The Washington Monthly

JUNE 1993/$3.50

- How to get hired, and how to get fired, on Capitol Hill
- James Fallows on Calvin Trillin
- Twentysomethings to baby boomers: Get a life!

PEROT AND CON

How Ross' teledemocracy would screw the average guy

By Christopher Georges

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The Catholic Church: the Whore of Babylon?

No. But as Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger Sr. observed, prejudice against the Catholic Church is "the deepest bias in the history of the American people."

For example, among fundamentalists there's that whopper of a myth that the Pope is the Anti-Christ, the Catholic Church is the Whore of Babylon, and Catholics aren't really Christians. Among the politically correct there's the sneering calumny that Catholicism is anti-woman, sexually fascist, and basically for cave-dwelling ignoramuses.

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The Washington Monthly

Volume Twenty-Five, Number Six June 1993

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LETTERS

Contract hit

Nancy Watzman and your editors were entirely too eager to paint contractors in a bad light in "Out of House, Out of Mind" [April]. In the article, the table of contents teaser, and the bold pull quote on page 37, you seriously misrepresent the facts.

CH2M HILL never charged the government for the items in question (liquor, chocolates, sports tickets, etc.) as stated in Ms. Watzman's article, nor was it ever alleged to have done so. CH2M HILL was accused, without basis, of including the items mentioned in your article in its calculations of the overhead rate it charged on federal government contracts. In fact, it never did.

Investigations by the Internal Revenue Service showed no impropriety, and detailed investigations over many months by the EPA showed that not only did CH2M HILL not charge any of the items mentioned in your article to the government, but that CH2M HILL significantly undercharged the government. The EPA actually owes CH2M HILL more than $500,000.

When you represent allegation as fact, and, even worse, when you don't even get the allegations right, you deceive your readers, jeopardize your own standing as a reputable source of information, and do a disservice to the targets of your misrepresentation.

RICHARD RAYMOND
Corvalis, OR
Mr. Raymond is an employee of CH2M HILL.

The author replies:

Richard Raymond writes that CH2M Hill was never accused of charging the government for liquor, chocolates, sports tickets, and so on, but rather of including these items in its overhead rate. It seems to me, as it did to the General Accounting Office, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, that there isn't a whole lot of difference between charging the government for these items directly or as part of the overhead cost.

As to whether CH2M Hill ever charged these items to the government, an excerpt from a November 13, 1992 letter from CH2M Hill president Ralph Peterson and CH2M Hill Inc. president Lyle G. Hassebrouk to the EPA's then-Chief Financial Officer, Christian Holmes, may help clarify matters:

> We understand as we did not previously that despite our good intentions and what we believe to be correct interpretation of the law, some of our billing practices are at odds with evolving norms and standards for federal contracts...[T]he first area of increased awareness on our part relates to certain costs related to employee morale, including employee entertainment. In direct terms, we are talking about reindeer suits and similar expenditures.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) investigations that Mr. Raymond refers to have nothing to do with determining the appropriateness of charging liquor and reindeer suits to the government. The IRS simply looked at whether CH2M Hill was operating within the tax code. A whole different set of regulations—known as the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR)—govern contracting practices.

Finally, as to the matter of the EPA owing CH2M Hill $500,000, it is true that the EPA came to a settlement with the company in late March—around the same time my article went to press. But Mr. Raymond was not at all clear about where the $500,000 figure came from. CH2M Hill was in the habit of giving the EPA what is known as a voluntary discount, something that many contractors do. After investigation into CH2M practices, the company decided to reduce its voluntary discount—which is why, technically, the books now show the company "undercharging" the government.

Doctored evidence

I am writing in response to "Bad Forms" [Christopher Georges, April]. I was one of the physicians interviewed by Mr. Georges, and though I was quoted accurately and in context, I agreed to speak with Mr. Georges believing that my practical experience with medical/bureaucratic problems might help your readers better understand some of the practical difficulties doctors face daily. I would never have consented to discuss my views had I known that by voicing my complaints with the present health care system I would build a soapbox from which to call for a one-payer, Canadian-style health care system while brusquely dismissing other viable options. In my opinion, the concluding section of the article leaves the reader with the implicit impression that I support such a Canadian system. I do not.

Had I been asked for my opinion regarding any of the health care reform measures now under consideration, in many quarters, I would have been happy to discuss my views. It is unlikely, though, that I will ever consent to another "journalistic" interview.

MICHAEL J. CHANDLER, M.D.
New York, NY

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Otherwise occupied

Deborah Horan's "The Promised Land Grab" [May] brought to mind Bertrand Russell's rib-tickling definition: "I am firm; you are stubborn; he is a pig-headed fool," when Ms. Horan writes that Hussein "ruled" and Jordan "controlled" the same territories that Israel "occupied." Obviously, one country's control is another country's occupation, even if it has not been legally established to whom the land belongs. Since the words "occupied territories" connote illegal possession, one would expect fair-minded non-Arabs to use a neutral term, like "administered territories." After all, Israel's claim to the territories is at least as legitimate as Russia's claim to the Kurile Islands, China's to Tibet, England's to the Falklands, the Dutch's to the "ABC" Antilles, et al; but we don't read or hear the word "occupation" there, do we? I suppose that if Palestine (Israel and Jordan) becomes, like Gaul, tripartite, the third part will be called Utbot—"Used to be Occupied Territory," or maybe Nut—"Now Unoccupied Territory."

BERNARD ADELMAN
Winthrop, MA

States rights

I read with great interest Scott Greenberger's piece "The Sleaze in Statehouses" [April]. While many of his points are well taken, I'm afraid he's guilty of using too broad a brush when he asserts that "state campaign finance laws make the besieged federal rules look downright draconian."

I have had the opportunity to monitor campaign finance reform in all 50 states during the last five years, and, frankly, I am impressed with what's happened. Several states, including Georgia, Kentucky, Rhode Island, Iowa and Nebraska, have recently enacted meaningful campaign finance reform legislation. Many states are actively wrestling with issues such as how to control the expenditure of surplus funds, restrictions on the frequency of fund-raising, spending limits, public funding programs (now used by about half of all states), contribution limits, and a host of others.

This intense activity is in stark contrast to the impotency of Congress in enacting reform legislation. Despite the large increase in PAC money, the soft money abuses, and the obvious advantages enjoyed by incumbents, the last time Congress amended the Federal Election Campaign act was 1979, over a decade ago. Meanwhile, the states continue to act.

RONALD D. MICHAELSON
Executive Director, Illinois State Board of Elections

Defense appeals

About Charles Peters' item on the law students who witnessed an epileptic seizure while taking an exam [Tilting at Windmills, May]: It was not only "a bit severe," it was stupid.

If all 500 had rushed to the aid of the sick man, they would have smothered or trampled him to death. The blamable person was the proctor or professor who refused to return the time of the students who helped.

The Washington Monthly

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Subscription rates: U.S. and possessions: one year, $35; two years, $66; three years, $92. For Canadian and foreign subscriptions, add $7 for surface delivery; air mail delivery add $32. Back issues, $4.50. Send correspondence concerning subscriptions, undelivered copies, and changes of address to Box 587, Mount Morris IL, 61054. For change of address, please provide six weeks' notice and include old address label. *The Washington Monthly* is indexed in the Book Review Index, Political Science Abstracts, Public Affairs Information Service, the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, the Social Science Index, and Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory and may be obtained on microfilm from University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Reprints of articles are available to individuals or schools at $1.50 each (prepaid). For reprint rights for all or part of an article call S. Tallapragada at (202) 462-0128. Published monthly except combined July/August and January/February issues by The Washington Monthly Company, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009 (202) 462-0128. Printed in U.S.A.

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ISSN 0043-0633. Postmaster: Send change of address to *The Washington Monthly*, Box 587, Mount Morris IL, 61054. Second class postage paid at Mechanicsburg, PA. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

I am the widow of a lawyer in a leading Washington law firm who, as associate and as partner, spent countless hours on pro bono work and on other projects, largely in Southeast, Washington, of social usefulness to the least fortunate of the District's residents. I have become sick of smart-aleck, snide generalizations, such as yours, about lawyers. It seems to have become the P.C. thing to make fun of them.

LAURA ROPER
Washington, D.C.

Correction:

Due to an editing error, Jonathan Rauch's book review, "Vintage Whine," [May] incorrectly stated that family income had fallen since the early seventies. The article should have read, "Poor and near poor families with children have seen their incomes fall since the early seventies."

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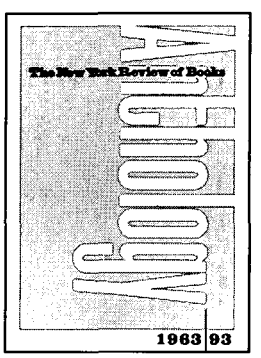

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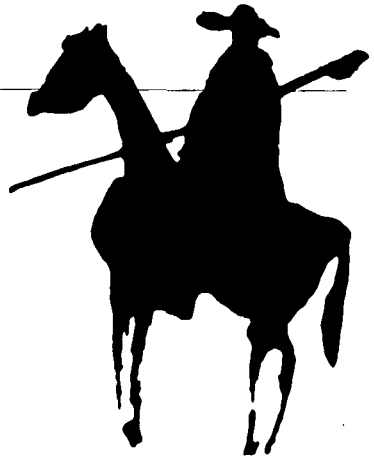
TILTING AT WINDMILLS



The Living Arts section of *The New York Times* recently ran an article called "Indiana Jones, Say Hi to Ralph Lauren" about how the yuppies are forsaking the Hamptons for mountain climbing in Nepal. Why? Because, according to one market researcher, chic baby boomers "never really had to test their mettle." They didn't because they didn't join the military, which the elite has evaded for three decades. Only a handful went to Nepal or anyplace else in the Peace Corps or any other service program. What we need is a challenging service program for thirty-, forty-, and fiftysomethings that offers them the chance to test their mettle by doing something worthwhile. How about going into the ghetto at night to tutor disadvantaged children? . . .

"Record numbers of Democratic staff members on the Hill," according to *The Washington Post*, "have been falling all over themselves for jobs in the Clinton administration." There is a hazard in this that I became aware of in a recent conversation with a Clinton appointee. He had called a staff member on the congressional committee that is handling his confirmation to see how it was progressing only to be told that the staff member was seeking a job under him. A possible and ominous subtext was that the confirmation would be expedited if the staff member were told his employment prospects were bright. . . .

Last August, after a Hartwell HC-B4 propeller had separated in flight, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) urged the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to require inspection of all other propellers of that model. The FAA did nothing. The NTSB repeated the advice in January. The FAA did nothing. Once more, on March 4, the NTSB warned "Separation of a blade . . . could result in a catastrophic accident." The FAA did nothing.

On April 19, South Dakota's governor, George S. Mickelson, and seven other people were killed in the crash of a plane using the Hartwell propeller. Investigators found that one of the blades was missing.

The story would be more shocking if similar incidents had not occurred previously so many times. As a headline, "FAA Ignored Warnings" has about the same surprise quality as "Corruption Alleged in Teamsters Union." To be blunt, the FAA is the most gutless agency in a town where the chemistry between sold-out politicians and cautious civil servants has made the competition for that honor keen. What did Bill Clinton do about it? He waited longer to nominate a new head of the FAA than any new president since the agency was established in 1958. Finally in May, two months after the third warning, and a month after the crash, he got around to nominating David R. Hinson as administrator. . . .

Bill Clinton is a man who aimed to be president from childhood. Why with all that time to prepare didn't he know about such weak links as the FAA and have a plan and the people—at least for the top jobs—ready to put it into place on Inauguration Day? We are told that he has this grand agenda for his presidency, but it's now clear that he had devoted little thought towards choosing the people who could carry it out. As of May 1, Clinton had made only 177 of the 625 nominations to senior agency and department positions that require confirmation by the Senate. One would have thought that all the FOBs we heard about during the campaign would have provided a sufficient universe of potential appointees, or if not, that they would have been able to recommend enough qualified people from their own universes. But apparently Clinton, whose self-confidence seems so boundless in many areas, does not have enough confidence in his judgment of friends to delegate appointment decisions to them. The word is that from the beginning he and Hillary were making the key personnel decisions alone. The secret to understanding him is that he is either extremely arrogant or, I

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suspect, that he is not as secure as he seems. At least in the case of his friends, he is not confident enough in his judgment of their ability to choose others to permit them to make these choices. . . .

Clinton is already insisting on too much loyalty to himself, insisting on proof, we have heard, of pre-Convention support. This is a terrible mistake. There are too few really able men and women around and far too few of them are interested in government work, so a political litmus test is stupidly restrictive. I don't scorn political appointees. I was once one myself and strongly believe that competence and judgment can be demonstrated as much in politics as in any other field. I also believe that a president needs a reasonable number of appointees whose loyalty to his programs is beyond question.

But it is also true that you can appoint people simply on the basis of ability and win their loyalty by the quality of your leadership. And if you're smart, you understand what Jimmy Carter never understood about Joe Califano—that sometimes you have to accept marginal loyalty to get high ability. . . .

Few more revealing glimpses into the culture of bureaucracy have been afforded than this recently unearthed tidbit from France during World War II. Even after the liberation, the French national railroad authorities continued to bill local governments for the cost of transporting Jews to German concentration camps, warning that interest would be charged for any delay. The bills were paid. . . .

Speaking of World War II, the single most powerful argument against intervention in Bosnia I have heard is that the largely Serb-led resistance was fierce enough to tie down 26 Axis divisions for three years. . . .

A reader recently wrote asking me to identify the leading beneficiaries of the S&L debacle. In terms of who profited the most from the scandal, it was probably the millions of Americans from the middle of the middle class on up the ladder of affluence who were paying low interest on S&L mortgages dating from the fifties and sixties and who, in the first half of the eighties, invested their money in high interest CDs that had to be paid off by those savings and loans. During that period, as James Bennet pointed out in a landmark article in this magazine in September 1990, the bank was getting 4.5 percent for its loans to Mr. Cleaver while it had to pay 12 percent on his CD. This was obviously a formula for disaster. While that disaster was facilitated by crooks like Charles Keating, as well as by ill-considered legislation, spineless regulators, and the cover-up and conceal policies of Reagan, Bush, Baker, and Darman, the main beneficiaries remain the middle and upper income Americans who cashed in. That's one more reason why we should try to get back some of the money the rest of us had to cough up to bail out the S&Ls. High taxes on the affluent seem to be the best way to achieve that goal, especially an estate tax that would catch those mortgagors from the fifties and the sixties. . . .

Two recent Washington stories remind me of life's familiar and lamentable tendency to be a broken record that mindlessly repeats the same mistakes. One was that the national service program will emphasize the role of teachers' assistants. We tried that in the Peace Corps, and it didn't work very well. Too many of the regular teachers didn't know how to use the assistants or were suspicious or hostile. What did work well—with careful selection, training, and placement (see page 24)—were programs in which volunteers actually taught in secondary schools. Maybe a teacher's assistant program could work, but it's wise for Clinton's national service people to study why the Peace Corps failed before implementing their own.

The other story with broken record potential was about a bill requiring government agencies to institute a system of "performance measurement." Since the legislation has broad bipartisan support, it seems to have a good chance of passing. How can I have misgivings about such a laudable idea? Because a similar program—called PPBS—was tried in the sixties with more than occasionally disastrous results. Too often, a desirable goal—finding out what a program was actually accomplishing—was implemented in a way that emphasized achievement that was numerically quantifiable. The result was an explosion of what bureaucrats call the numbers game, a cynical manipulation of figures to attain stated goals. The practice was most notorious in Vietnam where the body count was used as a measure of achievement. This put pressure on our soldiers to shoot anything that moved in order to build up the count. The result was that a good many women, children, water buffalo, and other innocents were "wasted" along with the more deserving members of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army.

What can make the difference in implementing programs like PPBS is making sure the goals are the right ones and checking up on just how the goals are attained. . . .

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Buried in a recent *Washington Post* story about White House staff cuts and congressional suspicion thereof were these sentences that must have left even the most loyal Democrat wondering. They were questions the White House director of administration was unable to answer:

How many live bodies are currently working in the White House? How many paid consultants are employed by the president? . . .

I am frightened by stories like "Outlook Bleak on Jobs" that appeared in *The Washington Times* on May 10. Reducing the fat will ultimately be good for American business and government. But that has meant and will continue to mean a loss of jobs that can only be made up for by new equipment, new plants, and new products and services. Why not give a strong incentive to this kind of new investment by making capital gains fully taxable except when they represent investment in new jobs?

Other items on my wish list are legislation forbidding campaign contributions to, or raising money for, a congressman by a paid lobbyist who has lobbied him, which will put the paid lobbyist out of business; free television and radio time for candidates, which will eliminate the major element in the cost of campaigning; and a $100 limit on individual contributions to individual candidates, including themselves, which will end the power of the rich. . . .

If you wonder why I want to get rid of paid lobbyists, consider the recent testimony of Charles Gardner about the lobbying operation he ran for Sperry and its successor, Unisys, on which he estimated $40 million was spent from the early seventies through 1988. Gardner says his company got the $100 million in contracts for each million spent on lobbying, including tickets for sporting events and concerts, fancy dinners, golf games, vacations, and campaign contributions. For his key target, Rep. Joseph P. Addabbo, then chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, Gardner said that in just one election—in 1984—he opened five campaign offices for the congressman, furnished them with equipment, and spent more than $100,000 on a private investigator to look for dirt on Addabbo's opponent. . . .

I have been wondering why our friends at *The New Republic* have not displayed the same ardor we have for taxing the rich. Maybe they realize that readers in the market for items like the Lincoln Mark VIII, which was recently touted in a two-page, four color TNR ad, are not likely to be eager to pay more to the IRS. . . .

You've probably seen the ad featuring a laughing FDR ridiculing the arguments against the Rural Electrification Administration. A pro-REA group paid for the ad, and like most lobbying ads, it is misleading. A lot of people needed the REA badly in FDR's time, but few need it today. A program that once strung the line that gave your poor Aunt Sally electric light to replace her kerosene lamp and candles now serves a largely affluent public that definitely does not need a public subsidy. Why not cut out most of the costs of the program by concentrating on Aunt Sallies who really need it and eliminating the Aspens and Vails that are now getting subsidies they definitely do not need?. . .

Can you read some Spanish?
Try reading *Perspectiva*:

From May, 1993 ***Perspectiva*** *magazine* – **Internacional:** Japón es el destino final de una **cadena** de fibra óptica que comienza en Europa. Los países latinoamericanos tendrán acceso a la **red** mundial **a través del tendido** *Columbus II*. . . .

From May, 1993 ***Perspectiva*** *magazine* – **Gente:** Entrevista con violinista Anne-Sophie Mutter: "La música de Lutoslawski me emociona **de tal manera que** ha **enriquecido** mis interpretaciones. Sus **obras** han inspirado mi manera de **tocar** los conciertos de Brahms y de Beethoven . . . ."

From April, 1993 ***Perspectiva*** *magazine* – **Nacional:** El **atentado** contra las **Torres Gemelas** de Manhattan causó cinco muertos y más de mil **heridos**. La policía de Nueva York **detuvo** a un **supuesto integrista** islámico, Mohamed Salameh . . . .

From March, 1993 ***Perspectiva*** *magazine* – **Ecología:** *El Niño* es una **corriente** periódica de aire caliente en el Pacífico. **Surge** de un calentamiento anormal de las aguas ecuatoriales del Pacífico. Hace algunas zonas más húmedas, más **secas** o más **cálidas** de lo normal. Los científicos creen que *El Niño* . . . .

Glosario bilingüe

This glossary defines words only in the context as they appear in BOLD in these articles. The symbol ◊ indicates an idiomatic phrase.

a través de ◊ by means of
abrazar v. to embrace
atentado nm. attack
cadena nf. network
cálido/a adj. hot
corriente nf. current
de tal manera que ◊ in such a way that
detuvo (detener) v. arrested; detained
enriquecer v. to enrich
herido/a nm/f. injured (person)
integrista nm/f. reactionary (person)
obra nf. work; piece
red nf. network; system
seco/a adj. dry
sonido nm. sound
supuesto/a adj. alleged
surgir v. to appear
tendido nm. cable
tocar v. to play
Torres Gemelas ◊ Twin Towers

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Speaking of the FDR era, federal employees who are griping about a pay freeze should recall that in the thirties, civil servants took a 10 to 15 percent pay cut to help the country get through the Depression. Or they might consider their fellow government employees of the state of Virginia, who have just endured a three-year pay freeze or those in Maryland, who are entering their third year without a cost-of-living raise and who are paid anywhere from 25 to 75 percent less than federal civil servants. . . .

Our criticism of the major media for neglecting the Canadian single payer health system may have helped inspire at least one catch-up article. Written by a respected reporter, Robin Toner, and headlined, "Realistic and Outmuscled, Advocates of Canadian Health Care Plan Fight On," the article, in *The New York Times*, seemed sympathetic. The trouble was that when it got down to the pros and cons, it tended towards uncritical acceptance of the cons. Thus this sentence: "Adding to the argument against a single-payer system is the enormous new taxes it would require." The author might have mentioned evidence that a single payer system will save money compared to other proposals for national health care. A recent study by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) says the savings will amount to more than $14 billion.

The Washington Post reported the CBO study, but managed to do so without mentioning Canada, so the reader would have no way of realizing that the advantages of a single payer plan were the advantages of the Canadian system. . . .

In 1980, the CIA reported that Soviet military expenditures were growing at a rate of 4.5 percent annually. Three years later that figure was revised downward to 2 percent. Unfortunately, the high figure had already helped inspire the tremendous growth in American military spending under Ronald Reagan. Franklyn D. Holzman, at Harvard's Russian Research Center, estimates the error cost $800 billion. There is little doubt that the arms race was second only to Marxism in its destructive impact on the Russian economy. Certainly, it severely impaired our ability to compete with Japan in the eighties as we devoted far too much of our wealth and talent to military production. . . .

Martin Anderson is a conservative with whom we often disagree, but we heartily endorse his crusade against the professors at prestigious universities who turn over their teaching responsibility to teaching assistants. These assistants are graduate students who Anderson correctly describes as "only a step or two ahead of the students in their charge."

Stanford has 800 of them; Harvard, 850; Yale, 925; Berkeley, 1,742. Even my alma mater, Columbia, has more than 600. When I was there in the late forties, I had only one such person for a single one-hour class. The rest of the time I was taught by people like Mark Van Doren, Joseph Wood Krutch, and Lionel Trilling. The great professors really did teach. It's time for them to do so again. If you doubt that they are needed, consider the results of a recent survey of 3,119 Ivy league undergraduates. Eighteen percent could not name a single Supreme Court Justice; 44 percent did not know that Thomas Foley is Speaker of the House; 50 percent could not name their home state senators. Good professors seldom bother with such specifics, but they try to inspire the curiosity that would lead their students to know the answers. . . .

You know how those Republican congressmen love to say the deficit was caused not by tax cuts but by overspending by Democratic congressmen? David Stockman, Ronald Reagan's OMB director from 1981 to 1985, recently addressed their claim in an article for Global Viewpoint. "Overspending is an absolute myth," he says. "The root problem goes back to the July 1981 frenzy of excessive and imprudent tax-cutting that shattered the nation's fiscal stability. A noisy faction of Republicans has willfully denied this giant mistake and their own culpability for it. Instead, they have incessantly poisoned the political debate with a mindless stream of anti-tax venom. If Newt Gingrich and his playmates had the parental supervision they deserve, they would be sent to the nearest corner wherein to lodge their Pinocchio-sized noses until this adult task of raising taxes is finished.". . .

Years ago, the *Monthly* called for the development of a non-lethal chemical that would render people unconscious for 24 hours or so without doing them any other harm. This seemed to us ideal for the many situations that require force but where killing people would seem brutal and excessive. When we read about Waco, we wished that we had been more persistent in our campaign. Still it's a good idea and we're glad to hear that it's one that Janet Reno now wants to pursue. The military should help; they too could use such a weapon. . . .

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Seventeen years ago, Clarence Hancock sexually assaulted a Maryland woman. He then murdered her by hitting her in the head with a hammer. When her 11-year old son tried to come to his mother's aid, Hancock attacked him, causing permanent brain damage. At a parole hearing, his therapist testified that Hancock had not faced the problems that led to his violent behavior. Still he was paroled. The United States Supreme Court upheld the parole last month.

The court also recently upheld reversal of the conviction of a man a jury had found guilty of murdering a 19-year old girl solely on the ground that the public, including the murderer's mother, had been barred from the court room during jury selection. The public was admitted to the trial itself. During the jury selection process, courtrooms can be filled with prospective jurors so that excluding the public may be necessary and reasonable. Both the defendant's attorney and the judge are still present to protect his rights.

Decisions like these worry me because they always stir up a demand for tougher and longer sentences, a demand that usually fails to make the important distinction between violent and nonviolent crime. Again, I'm happy to see that Janet Reno seems to understand this difference. She is, according to *The New York Times*, taking the first step toward eliminating long mandatory sentences for the low-level drug crimes such as possession of small amounts of narcotics. Such steps must be taken if we are to have room in our prisons to keep the Hancocks there for life. . . .

Clinton has tried to excuse his dilatory approach to making top appointments by saying that the FBI is taking several months to clear candidates. I can't help but remember that when I was in the Kennedy administration and had to clear possible appointees, I went over to the FBI and told them the exact information we wanted to know and when we wanted to know it. That sped up the process enormously, because without a clearly defined task, agents are inclined to spend too much time burrowing for facts that are not essential. By clarifying what we wanted to know about our candidates, we could clear people in six weeks or so instead of the several months that it now appears to be taking. . . .

Did you know that New York's Landmark Preservation Committee has ruled that trees can't be planted in SoHo because there were no trees there when the neighborhood developed a century ago? The reasoning seems to be that since the masses suffered without shade then, they should continue to suffer today. . . .

The people in charge of public transportation don't use it. That's what the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*'s Bill Sammon discovered when he looked into how much the big shots know about the problems typical riders were encountering on Cleveland's transit system. One official who lived only a block from one rapid transit station and works only a block from another explained why he chooses his Cadillac instead: "I just have a love affair with the automobile." . . .

—*Charles Peters*

VOLUNTEER SLAVERY

My Authentic Negro Experience

Jill Nelson

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Yosemite Scam

Our national parks need hundreds of millions of dollars in repairs. Our national park concessionaires are reaping hundreds of millions in excess profits. Hmmmm

by Michael Doyle

The good news is that summer, and summer vacation, are just a few weeks away. The not-so-good news is that, if you're like most Americans, you're going to have to find something to do with that time off. At $1,000 a person just for the airfare, Europe's out. The local beach, you've been warned, has more sludge than Prince William Sound. Another vacation with Mickey and Minnie in Orlando and you may just strangle the both of them. So, you figure, for the same price as a handful of tickets to see the Yankees, you could pack the kids into the Volvo and head to one of our national parks. After all, aren't Uncle Sam's parks the ultimate in safe, all-American fun?

All-American, perhaps, but safe? The General Accounting Office has calculated that America's parks are in need of at least $2 billion worth of backlogged repairs on rutted roads, collapsing buildings, eroded trails, and other park maintenance. Yosemite, for instance, is dotted with deteriorating restrooms and dilapidated supply warehouses, and desperately lacks employee housing. (Some Yosemite employees have resorted to sleeping in their cars.) Buildings in the nearby Kings Canyon National Park date back to the thirties. At the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, cracked and buckling walkways contributed to 29 visitor injuries in a recent year. At the Grand Canyon National Park, only 38 of the park's 438 trails are maintained; and at Yellowstone, the condition of 90 percent of the park's trails is considered "unsatisfactory" by the park service.

The Clinton administration may have requested an increase in spending for America's playgrounds, but the need far exceeds the plan. As head ranger Bruce Babbitt learned in April, the money needed to repair the parks isn't likely

Michael Doyle is a reporter in the Washington, D.C. bureau of McClatchy Newspapers.

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John Kachik

to come, as he had once hoped, from raising fees for grazing livestock on public rangeland and charging royalties on gold, silver, and other metals mined from federal land by private corporations. (Clinton backed off the plan, at least temporarily, after a cadre of powerful Western senators who opposed it threatened to torpedo the president's economic package if Babbitt didn't cave.)

There is, however, one way to get a fair start on raising some of the funds without dipping into federal coffers or taxing the general public. Turn to the hundreds of vendors doing business in our national parks who have long been on the sweet end of a lopsided financial arrangement. The 600 or so park concessionaires who hold contracts distributed by the federal government raked in gross revenues of about $564 million in 1990 through their exclusive right to hawk hamburgers, trinkets, hotel rooms, gasoline, film, tours, and more. In return, however, the federal government took only about $14 million in franchise fees. This amounts to less than 3 cents out of every dollar. "The taxpayer always gets it in the pocketbook. Nobody's thinking about them here," said James Richards, former inspector general of the Interior Department. In Yosemite, for example, the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. took in an estimated $85.7 million in 1990, but paid only about $643,000 to the government. This amounts to 75 cents out of every $100. In its own defense, Curry Co. says it has its hands full handling the 3 million-plus visitors that flock to the park every year. Perhaps. Even so, park service spokesman George Berklacy says, "the contract is the

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worst in the national park system. The return to the government would give an IRS agent a retinal hemorrhage."

While making concessionaires pay their fair share won't raise the full $2 billion needed to patch up the parks, it'll make a nice start. Simply charging appropriate fees for the 14 largest park concessionaires between 1984 and 1988 would have raised $83 million, Richards' auditors concluded. And between 1989 and 1993, low fees will have cost the government another $109 million.

Franchise fees are just the start. The government has all but given away use of public buildings and allowed concessionaires a bargain on utility rates. In parks like Yosemite and Sequoia, government auditors found that the park service has given up on at least $73 million in utility fees that should have been assessed. And in 1990, the General Accounting Office found that park concessionaires paid only $1.2 million for use of the approximately 1,400 publicly owned facilities used nationwide. Just down from the Capitol, on the shady George Washington Memorial Parkway, for instance, a concessionaire operating the publicly owned Mount Vernon Inn claimed gross revenues of $4.3 million in 1990. How much did the keepers of the Founding Father's trinket shop and restaurant pay the government in rent? Less than $115 a month.

But that's a mint compared with what California's Sequoia National Park's concessionaire Guest Services Inc. paid for use of 391 public facilities: Nothing. And that in a year when the company grossed $10.9 million at the park. A little farther north in the Sierra Nevada mountains, owners of the Ansel Adams Gallery in Yosemite enjoyed gross revenues of $1.97 million in 1990, but paid the government only $265 for use of a half-dozen publicly owned buildings. "Two hundred sixty-five dollars a year—that's got to be wrong," said Rep. Mike Synar (D-OK) during recent congressional hearings. "I'm in the wrong line of business, I've got to tell you. These are amazing figures."

Park concessionaires retort that they've earned their good fortune by providing quality service. The annual park service's concessions evaluations for 12 popular parks for the years 1985 to 1989 do show strong performance scores across the board. (The numerical scores for specific services typically run between 4.1 and 5, on a scale of 1 through 5, and narratives are filled with praise.) But while service may be top notch, it's also worth noting that the park officials who provide the evaluations work closely with the concessionaires whom they are charged with rating.

Parking fees

The concessionaires have other answers as well. What critics see as lack of competition—28 of 29 contracts reviewed by Interior Department auditors had only one bidder—the concessionaires see as praiseworthy continuity. And what critics see as K-Mart-low fees, the concessionaires see as a proper priority placed on customer service. Keeping fees low, they say, helps keep prices down for valid customers. Of course, they may have some points, but, not enough points to make up for the hundreds of millions of dollars worth of freebies they're walking off with.

Anyway, even the concessionaires who *don't* provide quality service get a sweet deal. In the event a concessionaire loses his contract—even for poor service—the park service must pay him off to move him out. In one 1978 case, the service had to dole out $20 million to a concessionaire it didn't like just to evict him from Yellowstone.

Most concessionaires, however, have no trouble staying put, and no wonder—they did, after all, essentially dictate the 1965 law that's ensured a generation of long-term, low-fee, noncompetitive contracts for the businesses lucky enough to be located in premier tourist destinations. One provision, for example, gives incumbent operators a "possessory interest" in their park investments, which means that would-be competitors have to buy out the incumbents' investments—an all-but-impossible hurdle to cross in order to compete for the slot. "This bill is totally destructive of any competition in the awarding of concession contracts," thundered Rep. Jack Brooks (D-TX) during a floor debate on concession reform. "The whole purpose of this bill is to remove competition from park concession contracts and to enact into law perpetual monopolies in our national parks."

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But maintaining the cushy arrangement has also required some upkeep. Concessionaires have, over the years, not only funnelled thousands of dollars in campaign contributions to lawmakers on all the right committees (since 1984, the 100-plus members of the Conference of National Park Concessionaires—recently named the National Park Hospitality Association—have contributed more than $71,000 to members on committees with jurisdiction over parks issues), but, for the more personal touch, have regularly treated leading members of Congress to free excursions at some of America's most beautiful parks. Yosemite Park and Curry Co., for example, has hosted Rep. Richard Lehman, who represents Yosemite's district, California Rep. George Miller, and three members of the House Appropriations Committee on excursions, all *gratis,* of course. "It's a real good way to get people into the park," Lehman said after one of his trips a few years back. "Just familiarizing people with the park is very helpful."

"The concessionaires have done the smart thing," says Richards, "which is to ingratiate themselves with the local congressmen. I don't want to make that sound illegitimate—every other special interest does the same thing . . . but for their size, the concessionaires have controlled an awful lot of the politics of this for a long time."

Meanwhile, in the executive branch, a regular revolving door spins top park service officials back into private business as park concession executives. Some of the luminaries have included:

- Manus "Jack" Fish, formerly the Washington, D.C., regional director of the park service, who left the government and joined the board of directors of Guest Services Inc., which handles concessions in the nation's capital.
- Russ Dickenson, formerly director of the park service, who also joined the Guest Services board.
- George Hartzog, a feisty former park service director during the Nixon administration, who now occasionally represents concessionaires as an attorney.
- Lee Davis, the park service's current concessions chief, who previously worked for 10 years for a major park concessionaire.
- A former park service concessions chief, Imogene Lacovey, who left the government to join the Conference of National Park Concessionaires.
- Allan Howe, a former Utah congressman who served on the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, who now serves as the Washington lobbyist for the concessionaires.

All of which helps explain why reform has been virtually nonexistent. But, says former National Park Service Director James Ridenour, "We believe it's time now that concessionaires' successes be shared more equitably with the taxpayer." Fortunately, Interior Secretary Babbitt agrees. Following up on work begun by his predecessor, Manuel Lujan, Babbitt is pushing a set of changes that would shorten concession contracts from the current 30 years to 10 or 15 years, demand higher franchise fees, and require periodic reviews for possible fee adjustments. In addition, there are other changes Babbitt should consider—such as amortizing the possessory interest to zero (in other words, no cost to government or competitors) over the course of the contract—to even things out.

Coming up with a plan, however, is the easy part. Turning it into law is not. Whether Babbitt and his fellow reformers—notably Senator Dale Bumpers (D-AR)—can succeed in making the concessionaires contribute their fair share will, of course, test the political muscle of the national park concessionaires. But it will also provide a test for Clinton and his administration: While the administration's backpedaling in April on its plans to raise grazing fees and charge royalties for precious metals may have been a good faith gesture to ensure support for the larger economic plan, failing to confront the concessionaires will show little more than timidity in taking on special interests. □

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Terminal Idiots

Nobody's dumber at buying computers than Uncle Sam

by Frank Greve

When a railroad tank car filled with pesticide overturned into the Sacramento River two summers ago, killing fish as far as 22 miles downstream, California authorities feared for the health of riverside residents.

Not to worry, pesticide experts at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Washington reassured them. After combing the EPA's computerized $14 million pesticide library, they concluded that the chemical, meta sodium, presented no known risk to humans.

Frank Greve is a Knight-Ridder national correspondent.

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Oops. A month later, two toxicology reports warning that the chemical could cause cancer, sterility, and miscarriages turned up. The reports, submitted in 1986 and 1990, had been inaccurately summarized and then misfiled, which was no surprise to anyone familiar with the system. So redundant and confused were the agency's nine data bases that information was constantly getting lost. Many veteran users trusted only Louis Rossi, a supervisor who kept paper records on file.

There was no disaster in the Sacramento valley, thanks to an industry hotline and alert state environmental officials who warned people against drinking locally drawn water. But the incident provides a dramatic glimpse of the government's disastrous effort to computerize itself. Across the federal landscape, offices are littered with unused, redundant, antiquated, ill-conceived, and incompatible systems. As a rule, they are eccentric and inefficient, bought to solve management problems that they've instead made permanent. "If you start with a mess and simply add technology, you end up with an automated mess," says Henry Philcox, the Internal Revenue Service's chief computer specialist.

He should know. IRS computers waste 100 million taxpayer hours a year due to errors, according to a former commissioner. Many of the mistakes are made by taxpayers. But hundreds of thousands of these errors occur during the IRS's touchingly arcane process of transcribing onto magnetic tape, by hand, the figures on paper returns submitted by more than 70 million taxpayers. Willfully oblivious to phone lines and optical scanners, the IRS flies tapes to National Airport from regional centers, then trucks them to the IRS's national data center in Martinsburg, West Virginia.

Like scores of other federal managers, IRS officials, who have sought new computers since 1970, blame the government's convoluted procurement rules. "Uncle Sam is the laughing stock of the private sector when it comes to buying computers," says former AT&T computer executive Steven Broadbent, who was until January the Treasury Department's top computer authority.

"What takes one year for the private sector to do, we're taking four to five years to do, and the half-life of this stuff is about a year," says former Internal Revenue Service commissioner Fred T. Goldberg, Jr. "It's a procurement process designed to fail."

Changing procurement rules, however, won't be enough. Shrewd computer buying requires attention from informed, decisive managers able to act fast and willing to take risks. Panda bears are more common in Washington, and the result is that the world's biggest computer customer—$150 billion in the past 10 years—is also one of the dumbest. The sums squandered on each of the government's hardware debacles, multiplied by the havoc these systems create, are adding up fast and soon the computer scandals of the nineties could make us all nostalgic for the Pentagon's procurement scams of the eighties.

Terminal illness

Anyone who's tried to master a new computer system knows how confusing the experience can be. But the government's learning curve has been spectacularly dismal, and when its financial managers make mistakes, they are extremely expensive. A few examples:

- For years, the armed services ordered supplies based on inaccurate inventories

Peter Kuper

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kept by incompatible computers. Now, according to the General Accounting Office (GAO), they're stuck with $40 billion in over-ordered stocks.

➤ Taxpayers owe the IRS $71 billion in back taxes and are suspected of evading another $100 billion, but IRS computers are too slow and inaccurate to chase deadbeats efficiently. Meanwhile, more than $20 billion of the debt is approaching the statute of limitations. (The IRS is now shopping for a huge, new $23 billion system, a purchase bound to be rare fun for government waste watchers.)

➤The Resolution Trust Corporation depends on a computerized real estate index to help it dispose of $17 billion in bottom-of-the-barrel assets from failed S&Ls. But the index lacks vital information—like purchase prices and brokers' names—in four out of five entries sampled by GAO investigators.

➤The Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (PBGC) is supposed to charge higher premiums to companies that don't fully fund their pension obligations. But the computer used to figure and track the higher premiums crashed in 1989. And it's still down, so there's no way of knowing whether the PBGC's 60,000 pension plans are complying.

➤To assure that borrowers get no new student loans if they've defaulted on old ones, the Education Department relies on a computerized loan history data bank. But the latest information extends only to 1991, a defect that sticks taxpayers with up to $800,000 a day in bad loans that would not have been guaranteed if the records were up to date, according to Education's inspector general.

Other federal computer follies are so dumb they're tragicomic:

➤Air Force systems engineers spent $1.6 billion to modernize the attack warning center at Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado, without ever determining whether adequate electrical power is available for the new computers. It isn't—no small problem for a complex required to be self-sufficient in wartime.

➤The Veterans Benefit Administration, concerned that it took an average of 151 days to decide whether a veteran was disabled, spent $94 million on new computers to speed up claims. Now it takes 140 days.

➤The Farmers Home Administration invested $500 million in computers five years ago to manage mortgage loans at the county level. But local officials still use color-coded paper files because the Agriculture Department has yet to devise functional software.

➤The National Institutes of Health spent $200 million on a mainframe system to assist "researchers pushing the frontiers of biomedical research." Small problem: "We're not using it," says biologist Alasdair Steven. Researchers prefer personal computers.

➤Defense Department doctors didn't have much say in a $500 million system to computerize care records for their 2 million patients. Now hospital doctors refuse to use what one Walter Reed physician described in recent E-mail as "a monstrous mish-mash of second-rate, poorly designed programs."

Rotten apples

Who's making these dumb decisions? Often someone who's no longer around. If procurements take four years, there's a high mathematical probability that the person who put in the order is long gone when the full scope of the disaster becomes clear. Moreover, because service and even hardware contracts are regularly recomputed, the company that provided the machines and programmed the system may not be around either.

The result is often a mess: an IBM mainframe, an Amdahl front end processor, storage from Storage Tech, a network courtesy of AT&T, and user terminals provided by Sun. "If something goes wrong, you've got to wonder whether it's the Sun platform, the Amdahl front end, the IBM mainframe . . . . Servicing becomes a very complex problem," says Treasury's Broadbent.

At one time, federal managers didn't really shop for their computers; they simply and reflexively bought IBM. The practice so offended House Government Operations Committee chairman Jack Brooks, a Texas Democrat, that he used the 1984 Competition in Contracting Act to open up the computer markets. Among the measures is a special General Services Board of Contract Appeals that has decided in

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favor of bid protesters in more than a third of all challenges brought in recent years. Not surprisingly, this sympathetic court has brought out the caution in bureaucrats and the litigiousness in losing bidders, and it is widely blamed for slowing computer acquisitions.

The jobs for which Washington needs computers are already convoluted. Programming the tax system of tomorrow, for instance, will take an estimated 2 million lines of flawless programming compared to the 40,000 it takes IBM to handle its payroll. "It's a mass delusion for us to pretend we know how to build the enormous systems we need," says Rona Stillman, chief computer scientist for the GAO. "When we've tried to, they've almost universally been failures."

"If you're the IRS or Social Security or the Health Care Finance Administration, you can't let your old system go down for a minute," says Terry Miller, president of Government Sales Consultants of Great Falls, Virginia, specialists in government computer acquisitions. "You have to change engines on the train while it's going 50 miles an hour, pulling a thousand cars."

Buying enormous systems for agencies that can't afford a moment's down time makes the government's purchases tricky enough. But a study of federal computer buyers compared to private sector buyers turned up one intriguing difference: Government buyers said they rarely considered a bidder's reputation and past performance. Private buyers relied heavily on those factors.

The reason, according to researcher Steven Kelman of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, is that acquisition rules emphasize weighing factors in awarding contracts as objectively as possible. Since reputations are difficult to quantify, the government simply doesn't take them into account. "*This* is the greatest scandal in government computer procurement," says Kelman.

Even small agencies have tended to buy their own computers and custom software, resulting in terrific proliferation and bewildering variety. Today, Veterans Affairs offices run at least 150 different computer systems. Justice has about as many. The Agency for International Development operates at least 75. HUD can only estimate its total.

The result is not simply chaos, but a frittering away of what computers are meant to do: help people think better, faster. The air, water, hazardous waste, and pesticide offices of the EPA, for example, all operate independent systems that measure pollutants differently. Thus it's quite impossible to say with certainty whether additional dollars to clean up pollution are best spent on Superfund or air pollution. "The real waste from failing to integrate information is that we have less informed, less rational national policies," says Jay Etta Hecker, an EPA specialist at the GAO.

Mega bites

Recognizing the problem, many would-be big thinkers have tried to unify information systems by developing common definitions and data entry protocols. EPA officials, for example, decided in 1989 to give each of the nation's more than 600,000 polluting facilities a single EPA identification number. The idea was to make it easier for EPA employees and the public to track polluters and the EPA's actions against them.

But nearly four years later, EPA officials still can't agree on the definition of "facility." Some insist it's a stack in the air; others, a pipe in the water. Some insist each building in a factory complex is a polluting facility; others say the whole complex counts as one. Classification is not a problem unique to the EPA. Efforts to develop a central computer record of all cases in litigation have been stymied at the Justice Department for 13 years. Justice's divisions can't quite agree on what constitutes a "case." The Agriculture Department can't define a farm.

Making matters worse, the bureaucratic imperatives all favor thinking small and using eccentric computers to protect turf. According to a Senate aide who has studied government computer problems, "If you've got a unique computer system, it's like a firewall protecting your agency from outsiders, from reorganizations."

In theory, every agency has an information resource manager who has the ear of the agency's top appointee, and in theory the General Services Administration (GSA) can delegate or withhold procurement authority from agencies. In theory, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) tests technologies and promotes compatibility.

In practice, the GSA lacks the expertise and clout to resist what senior political appointees

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The Washington Monthly

JOURNALISM AWARD

FOR MARCH 1993 IS PRESENTED TO

Steven Mufson and Guy Gugliotta
The Washington Post

The federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) isn't the sexiest of subjects, but in two stories—one in March, another in April—the *Post* went beyond run-of-the-mill reporting to illustrate what's right and what's wrong with the EITC. A $17 billion program that President Clinton wants to expand to $25 billion, the EITC is targeted to help the people who need it most: the working poor with children. Mufson, reporting from Washington, and Gugliotta, reporting from Memphis, found that because of complicated forms, families typically get their money in a lump sum instead of payments throughout the year. And 25 percent of those eligible don't claim the credit at all.

These facts add up to a disturbing conclusion: People living on the economic edge are forced into going without money they're entitled to until the end of the tax year—and sometimes they go without it completely. Clinton would raise the eligibility ceiling for families of four from $23,050 to $30,000, expanding the EITC net, and eliminate the bureaucratic confusion that keeps some eligible people in the dark. With smart reform, the EITC is one existing device that can help the president make good on his promise to lift up those living at the margin.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation. Please send nominations to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

Nominations for stories published or aired in June will close July 15. The winner will be announced in the October issue.

propose, and it has almost never done so. And NIST's federal computer bureau is tiny, academic, and generally uninvolved with questions about computer applications. It focuses solely on the most technical issues.

"It's a cultural gap," says Wallace Keene, a senior computer manager at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. "George Bush never turned on his computer, but I would expect Clinton's people to be different." Indeed, according to press secretary Dee Dee Myers, Clinton's thirtysomething appointees went into "technoshock" at finding that the most advanced equipment at the White House when they arrived in January were electric typewriters.

That may bode well for change, but thus far Clinton has done little to clear up the growing computer catastrophe the administration inherited. His proposed 1994 budget accelerates spending for computer modernization at the IRS and the Social Security Administration. But Clinton's best-known computer initiative—the vaunted National Information Highway system, pushed by his rich Silicon Valley supporters—has this irony: It calls for increased federal help to the computer industry, rather than the other way around. □

Job Opening

The Washington Monthly will soon have an opening for a reporter-editor. Desirable qualifications include practical experience working in or writing about politics and government. More important are intelligence, humor, and the willingness to work long hours for low pay. Applications should be accompanied by a list of three references and by writing samples that demonstrate fact-gathering and analytical ability.

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Where's the Beef Been?

Thought Jack in the Box's patties were half-baked? Look at the administration's plan to clean up meat inspection

by Ann O'Hanlon

About the last thing the beef industry needed was an outbreak of killer hamburgers. After all, meat producers have had their fill of bad news in recent years: Scientists churning out more and more evidence that beef fat not only plumps up your girth, but also your cholesterol level; the average amount of beef consumed by Americans dropping 10 percent since 1983; even environmentalists complaining that ranchers have been cutting down too many trees to create grazeland for their herds.

So earlier this year, when a Washington State Jack in the Box served up tainted, not-quite-cooked meat patties, the industry's woes got a whole lot worse. It wasn't just that bovines might devour the planet's forestland in 200 years, or that too many Big Macs will kill you in 20, but that eating the wrong burger might kill you tonight. If federal meat inspection is so lax that spoiled meat could make it all the way to a restaurant table, what's to prevent similar bacterial outbreaks from occurring at any neighborhood burger joint?

That was one public sentiment the war-room Clintonites couldn't miss. So, to their credit, they wasted little time in the weeks following the tragedy to demonstrate that they would prevent future Jack in the Boxes. The solution, announced by Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy late this winter, was twofold: 160 more federal meat inspectors and a new standard to test raw meat for dangerous disease-causing microbes like E. coli 0157:H7. The plan was right on target—so on target that the media immediately trumpeted the good news on front pages and editorial columns as the long-overdue enactment of crucial reforms. Or so it seemed.

What the media ignored in their eagerness to declare the problem solved was that while Espy and his meat watchers were mouthing the right words, they offered little in the way of a coherent plan. A close read of Espy's "Pathogen Reduction Program" reveals a document so short on substance that it is virtually meaningless. The plan, laments Carol Tucker Foreman, assistant secretary in charge of meat inspection in the Carter administration and now a member of the Safe Food Coalition, is the equivalent of "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic."

But the Clinton administration isn't the first to repackage the meat rules and declare a breakthrough. In fact, the current pattern of

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"reform," judging from similar outbreaks in recent years, is the rule rather than the exception: Tainted meat enters the food supply; the government announces a tougher inspection plan; the media applaud; the new plan is never properly implemented—and the issue is forgotten until the next rash of deaths whereupon the cycle begins anew. There is, however, one difference this time around: Unlike the leadership of the past 12 years, this administration is supposed to be giving us more than government as usual.

Steer clear

Of course, the administration can be active in only so many areas, but it's hard to argue that meat inspection doesn't qualify as one of them. Six to eight million cases of foodborne illness occur in the United States annually, and nearly 9,000 result in death, according to the Centers for Disease Control. And of these deaths, more than 80 percent can be traced to consumption of meat and poultry. So inadequate is the meat inspection system that those who know it best barely trust it: "Yes, I eat meat," confesses one Montana meat inspector, "but I shoot my own." Another inspector says that while he does eat store-bought meat, he makes sure to conduct his own personal inspection for hair, ingesta, pieces of metal, and other surprises.

The most dangerous surprises, of course, are the ones you can't see: disease-spreading bacteria. While all meat that passes through processing plants is examined for obvious defects— carcasses defiled by feces, pus-filled abscesses, blood, hair, and the like—there's no requirement that meat be inspected for the little bugs that can kill. Inspecting for these microbes—which means augmenting human observation with equipment capable of detecting the bacteria that cause food-borne disease—means identifying contamination before meat is packed onto delivery trucks. The process involves swabbing the meat or sending a piece for lab analysis, thereby providing the plant and USDA with information on contamination, such as which bacteria are present and to what extent.

Certainly, the notion of testing for microbes is neither new nor part of a fringe-group agenda. As far back as 1985, for example, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) issued a report recommending sweeping changes in the inspection system, reforms which included a call for microbial testing. And then, like now, change appeared imminent. "We hurried to finish the report," recalls Norman Heidlebaugh, a member of the NAS committee. "We felt a sense of urgency. We thought our recommendations were going to be implemented."

Heidlebaugh's optimism was natural considering the unique combination of characteristics of this public health problem: It's big, and it's solvable. It's tough to say just how much that 9,000-dead-bodies-a-year figure would decrease with an improved system, primarily because lower disease rates would depend on what USDA deemed "permissible contamination" and how strictly it enforced that contamination standard. But putting microbial testing itself into place is the precursor to those other important regulations.

So when the White House made mouth motions about such seemingly smart policy, the press eagerly jumped on board. *The New York Times*, for example, reported that the USDA's new program would enlist "advanced scientific techniques and monitoring equipment to discover invisible and very dangerous microbes," and would "completely change the basis for safeguarding the meat supply." *The Washington Post* concurred: "The U.S. Department of Agriculture is declaring 'war on pathogens,' and its instruments of destruction will include the weapons of technology, infiltration, and information gathering."

The reality? The plan not only ignores any explanation of how the agency plans to fund microbial testing, but fails to even lay out what level of microbial infection in meat should cause inspectors to sound alarms. And those are just the obvious omissions. The plan, explains Dave Carney, veteran meat and poultry inspector and president of the North Central Council of Food Inspection Locals, is so toothless that it offers "no penalties for violations, it has no role for inspectors, and no pathogen is discussed in any detail."

Instead, the report, in the finest Washington tradition of water treading, promises studies and research toward better equipment. Out of 29 pages, nine are appendices and four detail a public and merchant education campaign—both rel-

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evant perhaps, but not what should make up half of a "program."

While the USDA has made good in one area of reform—hiring 160 more inspectors—that fix is little help without other changes: More inspectors simply means more people contending with inadequate contamination standards and plant conditions. "If something's gone wrong," explains Heidlebaugh, who is also a retired professor of veterinary public health at Texas A&M University, "don't intensify what you're doing."

But that's exactly what's likely to happen. The USDA is not opposed to a safer meat supply, of course, but once you get beyond its public posturing on microbial testing, agency officials aren't all that committed to making the reforms stick. Why not?

Recently Russell Cross, the chief of USDA's meat inspection division, claimed while testifying before Congress that microbes such as E. coli can be detected only through a six day test. While all microbes cannot be detected immediately, Cross failed to mention that scientists in his own agency, namely at a USDA lab in Philadelphia, are using a 24-hour test to detect the dangerous E. coli, as well as 48-hour tests to spot Listeria and Salmonella.

USDA bureaucrats, when questioned, also downplay microbial testing, arguing that analyzing every carcass would be impossible. That's true, of course. But who said every carcass should be tested? Spot-testing carcasses is not a leakproof safety net, but non-USDA food safety experts say it would go a long way toward bringing some semblance of control. Indeed, one inspection program heralded by USDA and others is the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point system, or HACCP. The awkward appellation simply means that there are a few, and only a few, points in the inspection process which are critical for quality control. If such "hot spots" can be determined, then spot testing at those points would provide extensive data on contamination.

Perhaps the only USDA excuse that carries any weight is the cost of the testing. But even here, the agency's estimates reveal more of a reluctance to tackle the problem than a willingness to see it dealt with effectively. USDA estimates that "adequate" testing will cost nearly $58 billion. Simply stated, says Ed Zadjura, assistant director of food safety at the General Accounting Office and co-author of a number of GAO reports on meat inspection, "that number is totally, absolutely meaningless. Nobody who has advocated bringing this system into the 20th century has advocated checking every piece of meat, which is what that figure must be based on. I think it's just a scare tactic." The budget office of USDA reports that it was instructed to calculate the figure based on a 20 percent sampling rate at $50 a test. Zadjura's counterpoint, once informed of the agency's math: Less than 1 percent would need to be sampled and $50 sounds suspiciously high. Suffice it to say that no outside agency has estimated what the program would cost, and USDA doesn't seem to want them to.

What USDA may really find repulsive about microbial testing, however, probably has less to do with limits of science or money than with simple bureaucratic cowardice. That is, USDA is shrewd enough to realize that if it is officially responsible for finding deadly microbes—admittedly no easy task—then it will be the USDA, and not the local burger kitchen, that will be under the gun the next time people die from tainted meat or poultry.

Fortunately, there is a government body that can make USDA take microbe testing seriously: Congress. Unfortunately, the legislature isn't likely to amend current inspection laws anytime soon, thanks to the usual combination of industry money and Congressional gridlock.

Meat and poultry industry PACs dug up $30,000 to donate to the 1992 re-election campaign of Rep. Charles Stenholm, who happens to be from Texas cattle country and who also happens to chair the agricultural subcommittee with jurisdiction over meat inspection. (Stenholm's $30,000 in meat and poultry PAC money, by the way, was $13,000 more than his opponent collected in total campaign contributions). Stenholm also accepted almost $9,000 in 1990 in meat industry honoraria, and took nine trips that year sponsored by meat and poultry interests.

Meat is mortar

It hardly needs to be said that revamping meat inspection laws would not endear Stenholm to the meat industry, which is an outright enemy of any governmental standards for microbial contamina-

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tion. That should come as little surprise considering what testing will mean, at least in the short run—lost revenue. Not only would it add another step to the processing line, but comprehensive testing would ultimately mean discarding larger quantities of meat than are now rejected using the eyeballing inspection methods.

Nonetheless, some larger meat companies *do* test for microbial contamination at their own on-site labs, mainly because some buyers, such as McDonalds, insist upon it. Is it cost effective? Just ask Jack in the Box. Government intervention would help small companies, who can't afford in-house labs (or big PAC contributions), and therefore aren't competitors in the McDonalds league.

Touch and go: The USDA's answer to microbial testing.

Courtesy of AFGE

A favorite Stenholm line is to cite the very real problem of divided jurisdiction—USDA is in charge of meat and poultry, FDA in charge of seafood and most other foods—and say the whole system should be scrapped and begun anew. This, of course, is a prescription for stasis.

According to an aide, Stenholm is not without a plan: more studies. Stenholm recently asked the General Accounting Office to take yet another look at testing. His office eagerly awaits the results, which are due out this fall. And, the aide added, Stenholm—in his zeal to get to the heart of the matter—may request yet another in-depth review of meat inspection, this time from the National Academy of Sciences. When reminded that NAS executed such a study eight years ago and that its recommendations are still not law, the aide blamed labor unions for resisting the proposed changes, but later acknowledged that there was some industry pressure as well.

The labor union charge rings, well, a little off-key. The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), one of the unions representing plant workers and inspectors, endorses all changes recommended by NAS and has done so since the report was published. The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the other major union, proposed an amended list of changes for the inspection program because it felt that the NAS proposals were couched in language that could provide USDA with escape routes from meaningful change. With hindsight, that seems a justifiable concern.

While Congress is busy awaiting reports, the last remaining avenue to prod reform might appear to be the courts, e.g. a class action suit by the infected masses against USDA. Forget it—it's been tried. In 1974, the American Public Health Association took Earl Butz, the secretary of Agriculture, to court, charging USDA with misleading consumers by putting the label "U.S. Inspected for Wholesomeness" on a product that could make you sick. The court ruled that microscopic examination was the only method of determining whether meat was "adulterated," and that microscopic inspection was not required under current meat inspection law. Which brings us back to changing the law and the politics of Charlie Stenholm.

All of this simply throws the ball back where it should be—in the executive's court. The Clinton administration may not be able to predict with any certainty, say, the course of the nation's economic future or where the next international bloodbath will occur, but one safe bet is that sooner or later, there's going to be another rash of deaths from tainted meat. Now that there's technology to help prevent it, what's missing is the political will. It would be satisfying if the man who gave a White House blessing to fast food were the same man who made the stuff safer to eat. □

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TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

"WE KNEW THERE WAS SOMETHING FUNNY ABOUT THE DEAL—WE DIDN'T HAVE TO STAND IN LINE FOR THE UNDERWEAR"

In Manhattan, a man was arrested for scheming to steal more than $1 million with the Medicaid account numbers of Russian immigrants he obtained by offering them angora underwear.

AND TO CELEBRATE THE END OF THE SEVENTIES, MAY WE SUGGEST PLAID SLACKS?

PART ONE IN A NEW SERIES—THE CELEBRITY HOUSING CRISIS

The New York Times ran a 34-column-inch story about the difficulties encountered by actor Michael York and his celebrity photographer wife Pat as they looked for an apartment in New York. "The problem with finding a place for the couple," the piece explained, "was that they would need the apartment for only four months beginning May 1, and most sublets stipulate a minimum of six months. And then many luxury buildings allow owners to sublet only once. Temporarily swapping their Beverly Hills house for a New York apartment, which the Yorks would consider doing, would not be allowed by some buildings."

NEXT LAUNCH THEY'LL BE TESTING THE EFFECTS OF WEIGHTLESSNESS ON LIQUID PRELL

On its most recent flight, the space shuttle *Columbia* carried a tube of Beck's Beer ingredients for an experiment to determine if weightlessness and cosmic rays can improve the taste of beer.

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Class Action

What Clinton's national service program could learn from Teach for America

by Jonathan Schorr

For a guy who isn't known for making short speeches, President Clinton can pack a lot into a few words. In the State of the Union address in January, at Rutgers University in March, and again in New Orleans on the 100th day of his administration, Clinton boldly pledged to include the nation's public schools in his national service program. The plan, something of a G.I. Bill for the MTV generation, promises college grants and loans for young people, "and some who aren't so young," willing, among other things, "to serve in our schools as teachers or tutors in reading and mathematics."

The idea, like Boston's community service-oriented City Year and the Peace Corps in the sixties, is exciting, but it's not as simple as it sounds. Perhaps college students and recent graduates could easily serve as tutors and teachers' aides, but Clinton's plan calls for some to work as full-time teachers as well. Overall, the president is asking for one or two years of service; most teacher recruits would presumably spend most or all of that time teaching. And while it takes five years to qualify to teach in most states, Clinton proposes sending those national service recruits into the classroom with just eight weeks of training. That may be long enough to train neighborhood clean-up workers or even police auxiliaries, but is it enough for teachers?

Teach For America (TFA), the recent private reincarnation of the sixties Teacher Corps, says yes. Developed by Princeton undergraduate Wendy Kopp (with whom Clinton met during his Rutgers visit) and kicked off in 1990, TFA sends college graduates to teach for two years in understaffed schools. As Clinton looks for a model of a crash course for teachers, TFA's eight-week program is an obvious choice, and TFA in fact has submitted a proposal to the president's Commission on National and Community Service. But my own rocky experience in TFA's first corps of teachers tells me—and ought to tell the president's planners—that a quick course and a year in the classroom without the support to make that year successful is a waste of the enormous potential of a young, energetic teaching force. Unless teachers are smartly selected, trained, and supervised, little of use will be accomplished except the soothing of New Democratic consciences.

Jonathan Schorr is in his third year of teaching English, history, and journalism at Pasadena High School. He recently earned his California teaching credential.

Training wreck

In many ways, I'm typical of the surprisingly large number of applicants who went after TFA's first 500 slots three years ago. One of a score of TFAers selected from over 100 Yale seniors who applied, I had had the best education money can buy. After nine years at Washington's Sidwell Friends School, which the president's daughter has made famous, and four years at Yale, I could have counted on my fingers the number of times I had been inside a public school. And despite volunteer tutoring in the City Lights school for emotionally disturbed and delinquent children in Washington and in the New Haven Juvenile Detention Center, I had never given serious thought

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to teaching. Yet, a month after I graduated from college, I found myself at Manual Arts High School in South Central Los Angeles as part of the TFA Summer Institute.

The eight weeks of TFA training were a jumble. Summer school practice teaching in the morning was followed by a mix of classes, seminars, and discussions in the afternoon at the TFA Institute at the University of Southern California. As is so commonly—and problematically—the case, our student teaching roles in the classrooms varied widely. Many TFA student teachers were consigned to the back of the room, observing the "master" teacher at work and occasionally making cameos before the class. Other so-called "mentors" dropped the full load of planning, teaching, and grading on the TFA neophyte, sometimes even leaving the student teacher alone in the room. My experience was somewhere in the middle: I taught one two-hour class solo and observed another. Due to an oddity of the schedule, I ended up with an English class with four students in it. Grading was a breeze, but planning lessons was not, and I was up far too late every night. Quickly, I developed a pragmatic approach to my classes. I tried to figure out what would get me through the next day, not what would make me a better teacher.

The afternoon's TFA Institute classes ran the gamut: classroom management seminars, methods of teaching particular subjects, prep courses for the many standardized tests we faced, lectures introducing us to the law, history, and theory surrounding education, and discussions of multicultural and bilingual education. Some of what we learned, especially classroom management and routines, was useful. But much of it—the fundamentals and general theory of education—had little relevance to our daily work. (If anything, theoretical training ought to be specific to the subject a given teacher is slated to teach.) All of it would have worked better if we had had the guidance of a strong mentor once we were in the classroom full time, perhaps with a reduced load the first year and then a second year at full speed.

In fact, the frequent TFA small-group meetings with a mentor teacher were the best part of that summer's training, though their value depended entirely on the talent of the mentor. Luckily, my mentor was a gifted, award-winning social studies teacher from New York City. He engaged each of us personally. Often he untangled our classroom problems on grading, discipline, or getting across a complicated concept. He watched each of us teach, offered support and criticism, and occasionally presented a lesson of his own as a model. Typical of the way he nudged us along was the journal he required me to keep. In one frustrated entry, I listed some of the things my students didn't know, including the number of justices on the Supreme Court (guesses were 28, 36, and 2). Nor could they think of a significant event that happened between 1925 and 1945. "I think the class is bored," I wrote. "I need to inject excitement and creativity." In a typed response, my mentor sympathized, recalled similar experiences in his own work, suggested articles to read, and consoled: "Your advice to yourself is right on target. . . . You are your own worst critic. Not such a bad thing!" He was right.

Talking ed

Soon, however, the student teaching, seminars, mentor groups, motivational meetings, and bad USC chicken were over. I cleared out my dorm room and found an apartment in Pasadena. A week later, while I was still sleeping on sofa pillows spread out on the floor, I showed up for my first day of work at Pasadena High School. Pasadena, to anyone outside southern California, is the sunny home of the Rose Parade, the Super Bowl, and Cal Tech—not as tough as L.A. or New York City. But Pasadena has its inner city, too, plus enough private schools (they outnumber public schools two to one) to drain off nearly all of the city's affluent families.

The first hurdle, which took me months to clear, was simply writing daily lesson plans. This is one of the hardest points to make to non-teachers. Because the classroom is such a familiar and uncomplicated place for most people, it's hard to see that developing and executing a good curriculum is about as simple as composing and performing a

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good symphony. For the first few months, my double-period teaching blocks—I taught two 9th grade English and social studies classes and one senior literature class—yawned open as terrifying blocks of unplanned time. I was advised to keep my 9th graders on their toes by switching activities every 10 or 20 minutes—meaning at least five different activities for each class. And worse still, no two of the five-and-a-half classes I taught each day were the same.

Moreover, in the hazing that is typical at every school (and, of course, in many professions), I as the new teacher was given one of the school's toughest 9th grade classes, which was filled with "social promotions"—students who had not passed the 8th grade but were simply moved along with their classmates. And there were learning-disabled students (reading at 3rd and 5th grade levels), severe behavior problems, students who spoke little English, petty (and not-so-petty) criminals, and so on. No one who has taught in an urban public school will be surprised by this litany; it's utterly typical. Giving the least experienced teachers the toughest classes to teach is a stupid combination, even for the most eager of young teachers. I had thought I was ready. I was knowledgeable and excited. My lessons were good, designed to demand meaningful thought and hard work. Though I would not have admitted it at the time, I, perhaps like most TFAers, harbored dreams of liberating my students from public school mediocrity and offering them as good an education as I had received.

But I was not ready. The morning 9th-grade class was a rough mix. Mario, who had already been to jail—for truancy—took a pair of bolt cutters into the school bicycle cage and tried to steal a bike as I watched. Luther, a 15-year-old father-to-be, was so stoned once that he asked to be excused to go to a doctor's appointment scheduled two weeks earlier. Gina, whose mother refused to allow her to take medication for her hyperactivity, cursed and yelled when I asked her to sit and be quiet. Ernie, a born entertainer turned gang member, never turned in any work, but had an uncanny talent for mimicking me, which he did constantly: "Unacceptable! Unacceptable!"

Boredom and frustration set in, intensified by the first set of grades, more than 80 percent of which were Fs in one class. I lacked the skills to "manage" the behavior of a student whose parents suggested slugging her in the mouth if she talked back. I was unready for the illiterate student who, after sitting mute at the back of my classroom for months, dropped out to take a job fixing cars for the school district. I struggled desperately to improve the situation—games, conferences, calls home, pleading and threatening, everything but juggling and standing on my head—but positions were fixed, trenches dug for a battle that was to last all year.

As bad as it was for me, it was worse for the students. The 9th grade is the most important year for an at-risk student. Many of mine, unable even to visualize passing, took long steps on the path toward dropping out. For others who were more motivated and academically able, the control battle in my classroom wasted their time. I clearly remember Chris, an able and kind student who would have been in private school but for his father's desire to see him learn to relate with "all kinds of people"—perhaps, his mother admitted, at the expense of his education. Day after day, he sat silently at the back of the room, asking me with his eyes why I couldn't control the class and teach him a bit more.

Class war

Two years later, however, things are incomparably better. I regard myself as competent; many of my superiors call me an exemplary young teacher, and I love my work. Indeed, I chose to stay on past the two years I promised TFA and complete my teaching credential. But my first year merits careful examination, especially as it seems to have been fairly typical for TFAers. (I had it easy compared to my TFA-trained colleague who had her bulletin board burned down and her car stolen by her students.) I was not a successful teacher, and the loss to the students was real and large. If we're going to encourage short stays in teaching, it becomes especially important to enable teachers to hit the ground running. So what would have prepared me for that first year?

An apprenticeship. Pilots learn to fly and surgeons to operate with a master by their side. Who's to say the work of a teacher is less complicated? More training before I entered the classroom would have done little because I didn't know how to understand what I was being told,

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just as exhortations to "keep your balance" mean little to someone who has never ridden a bicycle. My needs were clear: instruction in how to teach my specific subjects; a chance to ask questions about lesson plans and about how to deal with difficult students; someone to push me to think about and critique my own work; and time, always a teacher's most precious commodity.

The national service program could offer a bold new model for training teachers correctly, even within the confines of a one- or two-year commitment. The first step is recruitment. Candidates must be screened rigorously for both their ability to communicate and their seriousness. Once the recruits have been selected, they must be trained more effectively than TFAers are now.

Clearly, traditional teacher education does not hold the answers, regardless of time constraints. The courses I took at three different colleges over the two years I pursued my California teaching credential proved that to me. (California, like many other states, has responded to its teacher shortage by issuing emergency teaching credentials, renewable as long as the teacher is taking education courses.) I began at Cal State University. Just one of many frustrations was being told I was unfit to teach the subjects I had studied in college. Although I had earned Distinction in sociology at Yale and had taken several courses in history and psychology, Cal State declared that I would need 14 more courses before I could teach social studies. I was pronounced similarly unqualified in English, in which I had done extensive coursework as well.

What passed for a "lesson" in these education classes was often nothing more than passing out a reading and then reshuffling "cooperative" groups to discuss it while the instructor sat at a desk. Or we might watch a sample lesson prepared by a student who had never taught a class. Spending three or four hours at this after a day of teaching, when I could have been working on the five lessons I had to prepare each day, nearly drove me mad. The last straw came at the beginning of my second quarter, after a brutal round of budget cuts, when one associate dean advised me resignedly, "Don't worry about the subject matter. Just take whatever you can get into."

After two years of so-called teacher education, I can say that virtually nothing of what I know came from those classes. Teaching, like other crafts, requires slowly building responsibility. The initial instruction in methods, history, and regulations should be kept short—eight weeks is probably the right length—since little can be learned without hands-on practice. Defenders of the current model argue that student teaching is already a form of apprenticeship. Perhaps so—in the few cases where the mentor teacher commits the same energy to teaching the young teacher as she would to teaching her students. The structure is not the problem; execution is. Most student teachers report either watching as the master teacher teaches, or being left to teach on their own and occasionally getting a few pointers (if the master teacher is even in the room). Neither is adequate. Expectations must be placed on the master teacher; the master teacher also must be selected carefully. Moreover, rewards—both in money and in compensatory time—must reflect the importance of the mentor's task.

Reflection-and-critique sessions, probably best done in a group of young teachers with two or three experienced leaders, could easily be made a requirement of the Clinton program. Learning to teach cannot be seen as a small commitment, relegated to evenings when the workday is done. Instead, the first-year teacher's workday might include only half a day or so of teaching—at least, one or two hours a day should be free for this work—so that training and reflection will not compete for time with preparation. Yes, this will cost money. It's worth it. And it may be reasonable to demand a time commitment—say two years instead of one—from the teacher in return for the investment. Such an idea is not unprecedented; in return for two years of mentoring, the nascent Teachers For Chicago demands a four-year commitment to teaching.

TFA offers good evidence to counter my generation's reputation of apathy toward public service. There is much to work with here. The current spotlight on service, and the creative thinking going into it, is an important step toward recognizing *all* the problems in education. Most important, we cannot allow a generation of students to be guinea pigs for poorly trained teachers from either traditional or newfangled schools of education. As President Clinton might say, we don't have a child to waste. □

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Hill Climb

For House and Senate staffers on the ma
Here's how even the best-intentioned g

by Jon Meacham

It's been a terrible six months—months of religiously reading the classifieds in *Roll Call* and explaining to congressional office managers how your political science major, combined with that volunteer campaign work last fall, uniquely qualify you to draft legislation. You'll take any Capitol Hill job, anything at all; even answering phones for the distinguished freshman from DeFuniak Springs, Florida, would be *something*. After all, Lyndon Johnson first came to Washington as a secretary, and where do you think George Stephanopoulos cut his teeth? On "Good Morning, America"? He started out on the Hill, too.

Before you get carried away with visions of tête-à-tête cloakroom sessions with Mitchell and Foley, consider what you're up against. Last year, embarrassed by rubber checks and a House Post Office that gave away stamps but charged for cocaine, incumbents made a solemn vow: *Hey, we'll cut the staff.* Senators Boren and Domenici think 15 to 25 percent sounds about right. Meanwhile, there are 20,000 other staffers competing for power in 535 personal offices and endlessly balkanized committees and subcommittees—266 in all.

This means Hill climbing is getting a bit tougher. With some jobs disappearing, good fortune and friendships—always important in building political careers—are especially critical. What's less apparent but more important for government is what successful Hill staffers do after they've reached the top. Every culture has its archetypes, and the young tend to follow well-traveled paths.

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Research assistance for this article was provided by Nicholas Joseph and Ann O'Hanlon.

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ra Hudson's footsteps. Her name doesn't ring any bells? It shouldn't, but Hudson's spent a career making government work. An aide to Senator Bennett Johnston, Hudson quietly watches over the Commodity Supplemental Feeding Program, a small project that feeds poor pregnant women and the at-risk elderly.

Congress is full of similarly wonderful policy jobs; given the right cultural currents, there's no better place to legislate smartly and monitor what government is really up to. The unfortunate truth, though, is that what begins as public service becomes experience that's valuable in the law firm or interest group market. (Only a third of staffers stay in their jobs for longer than two years, even at the highest levels.) And in fact, many bright, ambitious Hill staffers never get to the substance of policy at all, attracted as they are to the mechanics of media politics. What we all lose in this transitory world of re-election politics, playing the press, and private expertise-peddling is having more Hudsons around.

Here's a brief tour of the bestiary of Hill animals—who rises to the top and what they do once they leave.

The politicos:

The quickest way to get a foot in the door is to come to Washington with a member you've known "since he was at 2 percent name recognition with a 5 percent margin of error," as Texas Congressman Dick Armey says. No matter how important your position in a personal office, it's probably not very important in the grand pecking order. Most staff answer constituent complaints about how this or that federal agency has screwed them; what's rarely asked is why Congress doesn't do a better job of overseeing those agencies in the first place.

Once you're on the premises, moving into the big game means you need to go after jobs with the leadership or prominent committee chairmen. "The key is who you work for and where that member is headed," says Randal Ihara, a former aide to Senator Robert Byrd. "The closer you are to the action, the better off you are."

You can't get any closer to the action than Marty Thomas, one of Gephardt's two floor assistants. She, along with Craig Hanna, Gephardt's "body man" who spends the day at the Leader's side, has a top-flight job: arranging, with the speaker's office, the legislative calendar. When the House is in session, she helps manage the bills and troubleshoots for members with conflicts when a vote is scheduled or when debate time is at a premium. She ran errands for Gephardt at the 1990 budget summit that probably cost Bush his presidency. She spends a lot of time chatting up the Republicans, checking political pulses for her boss. So how did Thomas get to hang out with the cast of the evening news? Through Tom O'Donnell, Gephardt's chief of staff, whom Thomas had worked for at the DCCC in 1988. Thomas, by the way, just turned 30.

The DCCC put her in the mix of people who get to know members at their most vulnerable: re-election time. Another key Gephardt staffer, communications director Laura Nichols, also came from the DCCC. "The committees expose you to the right people and to the dynamics of the districts and the states," says Rob Engel, the DCCC's 1992 political director. "That kind of experience is at a premium because if you understand a district, you understand a member." In fact, of the 10 members of the DCCC's 1992 top political staff, nine landed great jobs after the election, ranging from Al Gore's office to Robert Reich's to AA jobs on the Hill.

A Ph.D. and longtime Democratic strategist, O'Donnell is a political bigfoot who, according to one observer, "is absolutely tuned in—all day, every day. He knows the score, the players, the fight. That's the only way to make it at that level." While O'Donnell and his people are top drawer, the downside of putting too much stock in campaign experience is that governing can get confused with campaigning. The fun of running for office—the focus groups, the polling, the negative research—is only tangentially connected to, say, passing national health insurance or confronting deficit spending. "Politics is fun," says one Clinton campaign alumnus who has also worked on the Hill. "Government isn't."

Communications wizards:

You could try the flashiest segment of the political job market: press and communications. The days when press secretaries would sit around and just return reporters' phone calls left the capital with Spiro Agnew. In 1970, 54 House offices had a press secretary; by 1986, 226 did. Now, all but a handful have designated press people. In the Sen-

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ate, where members have a larger stage on which to strut and fret, three-person press offices aren't unheard of.

Because media relations jobs are high profile, reporters (who are often similarly generalist in outlook and mostly interested in handicapping the political game) tend to view them as powerful positions. When *Roll Call*, the Capitol Hill newspaper, set out to list "The Fabulous Fifty: Hill Staffers with the Real Power," spin control was a factor along with knowledge, access, and muscle. Twenty percent of the staffers who made the subjective list had explicit press or political positions; 35 percent were noted for their expertise at spin.

"More and more members of Congress, and virtually all senators, are creating press departments because they recognize the connection between their free media and their re-election prospects," says David Dreyer, who started as an unpaid House intern, became Gary Hart's legislative director and worked for Coehlo and Gephardt before becoming Clinton's White House director of communications planning. "And you have more and more speechwriters vying to win a scrap of attention on the news or C-SPAN."

In the best cases, communications operations market policy to sell a bill or a candidate with a coherent "message"; it's where the details of governance meet the political world. "Communications—speechwriting, travel, and spinning local and national reporters—gives you a lot of access to the member, and that's one way of feeling powerful," says a former staffer.

But press skills divorced from conviction are transferable; so transferable that, as in one recent case, people who worked in Harris Wofford's insurgent Democratic Senate campaign one season turned up doing press for the GOP the next. The preoccupation with public relations is much larger than politics, of course: This spring, Newt Gingrich's office was hunting for a mid-level staff person and interviewed six applicants. "And, you know, four out of those six had been communications majors in college," says Dan Meyer, Gingrich's chief of staff. "I was amazed that so many of them had that kind of thing in their backgrounds. Colleges used to teach history."

One rising Hill communications staffer is Laura Quinn, a veteran of policy shops and presidential campaigns who is now with Senator Jay Rockefeller. Quinn's resume is a tour through the Democratic party of the eighties: She's worked for the Brookings Institution, Tom Bradley, Gary Hart, Jesse Jackson, Joe Biden, and Carl Levin. "She has it all," says one Senate Democratic staffer. For younger operatives whose interests aren't as focused, the call of the hustings can box them in. "A lot of young people get hooked on the campaign stuff and can't get off it," says Quinn. That's one reason for the dizzyingly high turnover rate on the Hill; the humming energy of campaigns quickly evaporates if your boss isn't on the media make.

The experts:

Don't want to chat up reporters or shill for a member who's chiefly interested in pushing his "re-elect" (Hillspeak for winning electoral margin) up above 60 percent? Well, somebody's got to be back writing tax laws and funding Head Start. While many staffers are lawyers or academics who want to spend a few years doing something other than practicing or researching, there is a professional level. Like Laura Hudson, these longer term staffers, usually a step older, have learned the arcania of a particular policy area. There's Karen Nelson, for example, whom you've probably never heard of, but who, according to *The Almanac of the Unelected*, knows more about Medicaid than anybody else in Washington. She has the decidedly unglamorous title of staff director of the Subcommittee on Health and the Environment of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, but anything affecting Medicaid comes through that subcommittee.

Even among experts and committee staff, Hudson and Nelson are exceptions that prove this cultural rule: "Hill jobs are dead ends unless you want to be a Hillbilly for the rest of your life," says Tom Korologos, a veteran Republican lobbyist. "This is a company town, and you punch as many tickets as possible." But what permanent Washingtonians understand as automatic ticket-punching can be a haymaker to the work of government, especially when so many staffers keep their time on the Hill short.

When *The Wall Street Journal*'s Jeffrey H. Birnbaum checked back in 1990 on staffers who had worked on the 1986 tax reform act, he

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found half of them lobbying. Of 170 former key congressional staffers tracked this spring by *National Journal's CongressDaily/A.M.*, 115 have moved to the administration (many following bosses like Gore, Lloyd Bentsen, Leon Panetta, and Mike Espy); the bulk of the rest—50 in all—left for lobbying or consulting jobs.

What moves many of the best and brightest staffers to give up their work and cross the line to private interests? For one thing, Capitol Hill, even more than the rest of politics, is driven by youth. If you come to Congress shortly after finishing school or a campaign, you grow older, and over the years, family obligations mount. (Still, these guys aren't doing poorly financially: In the House, personal staffers can make up to $105,000, and committee staff can go to $120,000; in the Senate, the ceiling is upwards of $130,000.) But faced with the prospect of paying college tuitions (as Mike House was) and with maintaining an upscale Washington life, some staffers find the possibility of going downtown alluring. Restrictions are lax; at the moment, the people at the very top who leave have just a one-year moratorium on lobbying their old offices.

If you've spent five or 10 years with a committee or a high profile member—which is thought to be about average for this track—you naturally form what this magazine has long called "survival networks" of lobbyists, staffers, and politicians. So you see someone like Robert Leonard, the highly respected chief counsel and staff director of the House Ways and Means Committee, leave this year to practice law and lobby in a city he got to know in his 18 years with the committee, the last 11 at Rosentowski's side. He's joined forces with Tom Ryan, a former staffer with the House Energy and Commerce committee. As the health care interests ponder the coming war over a national health plan, such firms, with their deep understandings of how the institution works, won't be begging for work.

The problem with the revolving door, and with survival networks generally, is that government is already keenly responsive to concentrated interests. Put a familiar face on the concentrated interests—a former staffer, a guy you used to know over at the campaign committee or from Energy and Commerce—and thinking out a vote may be a lost cause. "Taxpayers are paying for these guys to learn the ropes and do the apprenticeships that they then go out and sell," says Pamela Gilbert, director of Ralph Nader's Congress Watch. "They shouldn't get in the door first because of the money they contribute or past relationships while everybody else has to sit in the waiting room."

The Duberstein Group is a prototypical case: Kenneth Duberstein, its president, was Reagan's last chief of staff and guided the nominations of David Souter and Clarence Thomas through the Senate. Duberstein has two associates from the Democratic camp: Michael Berman, who advised Carol Browner on her confirmation as director of the EPA, and Steve Champlin, the former executive director of the House Democratic Caucus. If you were an interest that needed to navigate Washington, who better to go to for a map to the capital's folkways?

So how will this latest era of congressional reform affect Hill climbing? The folks who answer the mail are in the clear, and it's unlikely that the top political and press operatives will suffer in even the most Bastille-like of revolutions. A few years ago, for example, a junior Democratic senator found out that Howard Metzenbaum had held up one of the younger man's bills. Fuming, he confronted the ancient Ohio senator. "Why did you put a hold on this?" the younger senator demanded. Metzenbaum looked at his colleague blankly. "My staff has the power to do that," Metzenbaum said, walking away. "How else do you expect me to keep up with anything?" While such care-and-feeding staffs are probably secure, the General Accounting Office, which does the lion's share of oversight, is on the block as well, though its staff has grown at one-tenth the rate of personal and committee staffs since the seventies. Some cuts came this winter when the House killed its select committees, which were staffed by the kinds of older, substantive professionals whom we actually need *more* of.

As Clinton tries to control lobbyists and negotiate the congressional shoals, the things that hamstring government in general are the things that the Hill culture implicitly and explicitly encourages. If you're on the inside, even with the freshman from DeFuniak Springs, your instinct is to do what it takes for you to get ahead—and that's what's got the rest of us worried. □

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WHO'S WHO

Leon Panetta was recently asked whether his predecessor at OMB, **Richard Darman**, had given him any advice. "Yes," Panetta answered, "and every bit of it was about how to screw your enemies."...

The traditional struggle between the White House and the Foreign Service over embassy appointments has made its first appearance in **Bill Clinton**'s administration. In early spring, **Warren Christopher** sent the White House a list of 30 ambassadorial nominees drawn entirely from the ranks of the Foreign Service. The White House rejected most on the ground of inadequate EGG diversity. (EGG, in case you don't know, refers to ethnicity, gender, and geography.) State Department officials are, of course, convinced that the White House was also motivated by a desire to save some of the appointments to reward the politically faithful....

The rumor that **Alice Rivlin** will be fired will, we understand, turn out to be untrue not because **Clinton** wouldn't like to get rid of her but because Rivlin's respectable Washington constituency is more than he can afford to take on at this time....

It seems that **Richard Gephardt**, the House majority leader, likes to dine well while pondering matters of state. During just one three-month period last year, according to Jack Anderson and Michael Binstein, he charged to House expense—that means you and me—$5,570.65 for "working lunches and dinners" catered by La Brasserie, a French restaurant on Capitol Hill....

Donna Shalala has abolished the DHHS office that employed **Walter Stewart**, an expert on scientific fraud. Cynics wonder if the action might be related to the fact that Stewart had accused the University of Wisconsin, then under Shalala's leadership, of a "scandalous cover up" of a scientific fraud case....

The cynics are also wondering if **Clinton**'s decision to reverse restrictions on a West Coast fishery has anything to do with the fishery's acquisition by Clinton's old friends at the Arkansas-based **Tyson's Foods**....

Al Gore's continuing influence was demonstrated again in May when **Janet Reno** appointed **Frank Hunger**, Gore's brother-in-law and close friend, to run the Justice Department's civil division, and **Clinton** named **Roy Neel**, Gore's chief of staff, to be White House deputy chief of staff. Some say Neel lacks the necessary toughness, but he was so highly respected by the Clintons that he was one of the five associates who regularly joined them in the cabinet-making meetings during the transition....

Neel's appointment may only be coincidentally related to the recent revelation that his now co-deputy, **Mark D. Gearan**, has been keeping a camcorder in his desk so that he can film visiting movie stars. And some observers feel that **George Stephanopoulos** let **Jennifer Grey**'s press agent make a fool out of him. But the main knock against Stephanopoulos is not that he was gulled by a Hollywood starlet but that he has far too little humor to play the role of defuser that **Pierre Salinger**, among others, performed so well in **John Kennedy**'s White House....

Clinton blamed **Stephanopoulos** for the newspaper article that said sailors on the USS Theodore Roosevelt had bad-mouthed him. According to *The Wall Street Journal*'s **Jeffrey Birnbaum**, Clinton gave his communications director a tongue-lashing, bellowing "This isn't true." The sad truth that Birnbaum didn't report but that we hear from friends is that Clinton's temper is feared by everyone on the staff, which means they are disinclined to speak up for fear of provoking his displeasure. This problem is exacerbated by Clinton's apparent belief that he's smarter than anybody else around, except **Hillary**....

Roll Call reports what it calls "a potential nightmare" for the **Clintons**. It is the possibility that the price control part of the administration's health plan could wind up under the jurisdiction of a Senate banking subcommittee chaired by their dear friend, Senator **Richard Shelby**, who, you will recall, the White House regarded as the one Democratic traitor on the economic stimulus package....

Why didn't **George Shultz** disclose before last fall's elections his evidence that **George Bush** knew about the Iran arms-for-hostages deal much earlier than Bush had admitted? One reason, he told a reporter, was that his "book was not ready in time." How, in other words, could he have been expected to come forward when doing so would not have aided his book sales?...

John McCaslin of *The Washington Times* heard a rumor that Senator **Robert Byrd** was going to close his office the Monday after the Gay Rights March so that he wouldn't have to deal with homosexual lobbyists. McCaslin, who hesitated to credit the report because Monday was not a legal holiday for federal employees, called the senator's office and heard this recorded message: "This is Senator Robert Byrd. I thank you for calling. My office is closed at this time. Please leave your name," etc....

—*Susan Threadgill*

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Capitol Punishment

How the Hill's religion of the revolving door cost me my job in a Senate office.

by Jamie Stiehm

Business As Usual: Bill Clinton says he's going to clean up Washington, but the people with the money clearly don't believe him. Last week the Republican lobbying firm of Black, Manafort, Stone & Kelly hired for an undisclosed six-figure salary Michael Lewan, assistant to Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut. Lieberman, who is close to Clinton, is often held out as an example of the new idealism. Perhaps on his next television appearance he will explain why his former aide is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, and why Lewan was so quick to take the money and run.

—*The New Republic*, December 14, 1992

Ten days before this appeared on Washington newsstands, Lewan, with tears in his eyes, broke the news to Lieberman's staff, which he had led since 1989. "They don't represent South Africa," Lewan joked of his new firm, trying to lighten the moment, "and that's about where my ethics end." I was new to Capitol Hill, a speechwriter in Lieberman's office, so Lewan's announcement didn't affect me deeply. Others cried as Lewan spoke; he was a popular figure at the center of the senator's staff, a veteran who had kept the operation together. He would be missed. The rest of that day at the office—the Friday before Thanksgiving—was mixed with mourning and congratulations.

That night, I went to dinner with my beau, Michael Lewis, a writer at *The New Republic*. I told him what Lewan had said and where he was going. It was, after all, the story of my day; I was thinking about the effect on my co-workers, especially a group of legislative assistants who had befriended me: Barbara, Sarah, Nina, and Joyce. I had walked to the Metro that night with Barbara, and I could see how much Lewan meant to her.

Jamie Stiehm is a Washington writer.

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Michael Lewis cared more about the political angles of the story. He said it was outrageous that Lewan was crossing over from public service to private interests—not only to a lobbying firm, but to a mostly Republican one, with a Watergate dirty trickster on its letterhead. Lewis saw this as a textbook case of Washington's revolving door. "This is a news story," he said. "We ought to put it in the magazine."

"You wouldn't do that," I said, not thinking he was serious.

But he was. On Monday afternoon, while I was working in the senator's office, Michael Lewis called. He told me that he had written a short, unsigned editorial note for the magazine, criticizing Lewan's move and challenging Lieberman to say something about it. But he wouldn't run the piece if I objected, knowing it might put me in a bad position with the office since my relationship with Michael was fairly well-known.

I had to decide then and there, and I decided not to ask Michael to drop the story. I didn't feel I had the right to tell him not to write about a piece of public information; Lewan had, after all, said we were free to tell others about his decision. I didn't feel as strongly about Lewan's going over to the private sector, but thought public information is just that. On Tuesday, Michael and I flew to California for Thanksgiving; the issue of the magazine with the Lewan note in it wouldn't appear until the end of the week. That same Tuesday, the news about Lewan's job change appeared in Lois Romano's gossip column in *The Washington Post*, which alleviated any doubts I had that this was indeed a story, fair and square, in the public domain. But Washington was about to drum me with one of its oldest cultural truths: The instinct to keep up appearances and protect the boss will drive otherwise fully formed adults into a tribal hysteria. That hysteria cost me my job—all for a paragraph commenting on something that, by the time *The New Repubic* appeared, had already been publicized.

Capitol games

When I returned to work on Monday, Lewan called me into his office, pointed to the item and asked me what I thought he should do about it. I didn't answer the question he didn't ask: Did I know who wrote it? When I mentioned it was in the *Post*, Lewan said that he himself was the "source" for that story. "Lois [Romano] is a friend of mine," he said. Clearly, *The New Republic* story had rankled the office; one staffer referred derisively to "your boyfriend's rag." Two men in my office and I debated the merits of leaving the Hill to lobby the Hill. They saw nothing wrong with Lewan's move and equated lobbying with the right to legal counsel. "I'm a lawyer, and right now I have only one client, and his name is Joe Lieberman," said one. "But that won't always be true."

Lewan called me in again that week. I really want to know who wrote this, he said. I told him the way it had happened: I had told Michael Lewis the news, since Lewan himself had said that we were free to tell others. I had done it without any idea that it would be published. And I was sorry it had happened that way. Then I was in for a rebuke. Lewan said I had broken "bonds of trust" with my colleagues that would take time to rebuild. I would have to explain everything. This was going to end up in a Republican negative campaigning file.

I then met with two top staffers. This was Lieberman's first significant negative publicity since he was elected in 1988 and increasingly, the sense in the air was that *I*, not Lewan or Lewis, was responsible. Still I had not leaked anything; I had just reported a piece of news. Would Lewis have written the note if I hadn't told him the news? He says yes. Lewan's move was also reported in *National Journal* and *Roll Call* that same week.

I made an appointment to see the senator the next day. By then I started to feel a chill setting in. To understand what followed, remember how Capitol Hill works: The cult of personality, of fealty to the Representative or the Senator (the capital letter is always implied) overrides everything, including rational thought.

I sent a computer note to Sarah, asking her if we could talk. No response. When I ran into her, she said simply, "I'm too crazed."

Then I asked Nina if she wanted to go to lunch.

I've got to catch up, she said.

Barbara, I noticed, had not said a word to me.

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So I ate lunch alone and prepared to see the senator.

When I went into his office, he shook my hand, which I took as a bad sign. How are you? he asked. "A little dismayed," I answered. And then I made my point as clearly as I could.

I told Michael Lewis about Michael Lewan's move . . .

Probably everyone did that night, Lieberman said.

. . . and I can promise you and everybody else that confidential information will never end up in *The New Republic*, but I can't be held accountable for how the magazine covers something that's clearly in the public domain.

That's fair, the senator said. He said he told Lewan that it was something he had to expect, that "a hundred journalists could have written that story." We parted on friendly terms; I thought everything was settled. But when I spoke to Jim, the press secretary, again, the staff's mood had turned black. He said that "three unnamed people" had complained about me and asked how they could be sure what they said wouldn't end up in *The New Republic*, as if I were some sort of double agent.

I offered to bring banana bread to the office breakfast one morning. A little later I received a computer note: "Banana bread won't do it. I don't think anyone will want to eat it." Why not? I wrote back. "Because everybody is hurting too much," she replied by computer.

If Friday was chilly, Monday was frozen. Nobody would look at me, much less speak. It was a week of staff forums; we met every morning to hear guest speakers in the Appropriations Committee room in the Dirksen building. That morning, Lewan read us a statement, apparently produced over the weekend, on conflicts of interest: "Sometimes we take for granted that all of our Lieberman family fully understands or appreciates these standards. . . . Acceptance of employment carries an obligation of loyalty to the senator. Each employee has the obligation to carry on his or her personal affairs in such a way as to avoid the possibility, or even the appearance, of a conflict between responsibility to the senator and the employee's own self-interest." The irony of his lecturing on ethical conflicts of interest was lost on me just then.

In the afternoon, I offered to bring in banana bread to contribute to the office breakfast one morning, and the woman in charge accepted the offer. A little later, I received a computer note at my desk: "Banana bread won't do it. I don't think anyone will want to eat it."

Why not? I wrote back.

"Because everybody is hurting too much," she replied, again by computer.

The next afternoon, I ran into the senator in the elevator after he addressed a Progressive Policy Institute panel. I told him that things were getting worse, and that I might need to ask him to repeat to the staff what he had said to me on Friday. I already have, Lieberman said. I've told them to come talk to you.

The next day, the senator's secretary told me that she had prayed that morning "not to give in to the mentality of the mob." But the worst was yet to come. Nina and I met in the atrium of the Hart building. Sarah, Joyce, and Barbara came along. I started out by asking what they thought I had done wrong.

Wait a minute, Barbara cut in. Let's get this clear. Do you mean to say that you don't think you've done anything wrong?

No, I said.

I am mad at you for so many reasons, Jamie. I was doing you a favor by not speaking to you until now, because last week I was ready to do serious damage. We included you as a colleague. We included you and you betrayed us, everyone in this office, which we built up from the ground.

There was no way, in their minds, that Michael Lewis could have written that story without my eager help. There was "a certain spin on the story," said Sarah, "which he couldn't get anywhere else."

Nina said, We've been thinking back to some of our conversations with you, and

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Ken—let's say Ken, but it could have been anyone—said that you asked whether the new administrative assistant would be a woman, and whether the senator was good about hiring women.

And you asked how the senator voted on Clarence Thomas, another chimed in.

Yes, everyone has a story like that, said Nina.

So I sat there, silently, while Barbara kept on: Why are you still here, Jamie, if you think so little of us? And another: This is what blows my mind more than anything: that you are supposed to make the Senator look good. And now look at what you've done.

Barbara's last words to me were: I won't try to hurt you, Jamie—which was a big relief—but stay out of my way. Is that distinction clear to you?

What was clear was that it was all over, not just between me and Barbara, but between me and everyone there. They rose up as a group, satisfied with a job well done. I had, in their minds, broken the code and was now associated with the enemy—in this case, a critical press. As I sat there, I realized that however civilized they appeared, they were fundamentally a tribe. The rule was, don't do anything, however peripheral, that might hurt the chief.

Staff freeze

The next day, I barely made it to work. The senator was scheduled to speak to the staff that morning, and he was addressing everyone when I walked in. The senator was the only one who could turn things around. But I suspected he wasn't going to take a public stand on my guilt or innocence, and I was right about that.

My next stop was to visit a woman who worked in another office on Capitol Hill. On hearing my story, she said, "You broke the biggest rule."

"But all that seems to matter here are appearances," I said. "Not action, but the appearance of action."

"That is always all that matters," she said. "The way something looks, not the way it is."

The next morning was Friday. I noticed that doors were uncharacteristically shut around the office. I had just turned on my computer when I heard Bill Bonvillian, Lieberman's chief counsel, behind me. "Jamie, can Jim and I talk to you?" Bill laid it out nice and clean for me. He had never seen anything like this in his life; he had never expected it and I was clearly miserable, judging by the look on my face when I walked into the staff meeting the day before. Nobody is getting any work done. People we've worked with for a long time say they can't work with you. We think the only way to go is for you to resign. We'll keep you on the payroll for a month. This is a good time to look for a job in Washington, and we'll help you find one.

Jim, the press secretary, was quick to point out, It's not the story. It's the staff reaction to the story.

I'm on trial here I said, and, even among lawyers, I've been convicted by gossip and whispers.

Yeah, well, the trial's over, said Bill.

Over the weekend, I decided I wasn't going to do anything, much less resign, without speaking to the senator. Bill said he would try to arrange this, but unfortunately the senator was "*incommunicado* in Disney World" for the next two or three days. He returned to the office on the following Wednesday, and I spoke to him on the telephone in the late afternoon.

The senator, again, was as friendly as he could be. I began by saying I had never been disloyal to him. "I take you at your word," he said, and "life is full of many chapters." He didn't want to force me out. I had to make my own decision about this. But "relations were so ruptured," as he put it, that perhaps it would be for the best. This should be the worst thing that ever happens to you, he said, quoting his mother. He would be happy to speak for the quality of my work.

When I spoke to Bill afterward, he said he would look into a "severance package." He had mentioned earlier that it would be a good thing for me to write a letter of resignation. Looking it all over, as I have many times since it happened, I do not pretend to be a First Amendment heroine. New to Washington, I stumbled into a culture I didn't understand. Michael Lewan is now at his lobbying firm, and the tribal dance goes on. □

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MEMO OF THE MONTH

United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, D.C. 20240

TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA

April 20, 1993

Administrative Services Letter No. 35 (Revised)

To: Solicitor
Assistant Secretaries
Inspector General
Heads of Bureaus and Offices
Bureau Assistant Directors for Administration
Printing and Publications Officials (Nationwide)

From: Director of Administrative Services

Subject: Use of "Take Pride in America" (TPIA) Logo on Departmental Letterhead

This issuance revises Administrative Services Letter No. 35 dated September 2, 1986, referencing use of the TPIA logo on Departmental letterhead.

The Secretary no longer requires that the TPIA logo be printed on Departmental letterhead. Therefore, effective immediately, please ensure that the TPIA logo is removed from any future printing requests for bureau/office letterhead. In addition, the TPIA logo is not to be printed on any Departmental publications. **Please note that the Secretary has authorized use of existing letterhead and publications displaying the logo until supplies are exhausted, but no longer than one year from the date of this Letter.**

Offices may not request a logo or slogan to be printed in its place. The TPIA logo was a special Secretarial initiative and the only logo authorized to be printed on Departmental letterhead.

Please ensure wide distribution of this letter. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Victor Trilling, Chief, Division of Printing and Publications, Office of Administrative Services, on (202) 208-6748.

Albert C. Camacho

Albert C. Camacho

cc: Chief of Staff

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Perot and Con

Ross' teledemocracy is supposed to bypass special interests and take the influence of money out of politics. It won't

by Christopher Georges

By the time of the Major League All Star game last July, Edgar Martinez was near the top of virtually every stack of numbers in the big leagues: third in the league in hitting (.319 average), 46 runs-batted-in, 14 home runs—and a standout third baseman. But come the big game, starting at third was not Martinez, but struggling Boston Red Sox Wade Boggs, whose ho-hum .268 average was 64th in the league, and who had 25 runs-batted-in and 6 home runs. So why did Boggs get the nod over Martinez? All Star starters aren't selected by experts, but by the fans in a popular vote. So while Seattle Mariner Martinez garnered 500,000 votes from the bleacher set—finishing *fifth* in the third base plebiscite—he wasn't even close to Boggs's 1.2 million. Were the fans duped—fooled perhaps by the cachet of the Boggs name? Or did they know Martinez was the best man, but still wanted to see the hobbling Fenway legend in one more All Star go-round?

Whatever the reason, Boggs's selection raises a broader question: The All Star selection process appeals to the fans, but does it produce the best team? The answer is relevant to more than just readers of *Baseball Digest*, because in a very different realm—the political one—we are creeping ever closer towards the kind of system that put Boggs in the All Star lineup: a direct, let-the-majority-decide democracy. That drift towards direct democracy, while certainly part of a larger movement is currently led by Ross Perot. Problem is, the Prince of Populism's vaunted teledemocracy will not only give us more Boggs's and fewer Martinez's, but rather than, as advertised, "taking America back," it may well hand it over to the special interests.

Of course, populist yearnings among the American people—from Thomas Jefferson to Robert LaFollette to Bill Clinton—have been as common as House scandals. But today, three forces have converged to make direct democracy a viable, even appealing, option. For one the public's frustration with government—and with Congress in particular—has reached new heights: Eighty percent of those surveyed earlier this year in a *Washington Post*/ABC News poll, for example, said that the "country needs to make major changes in the way government works." At the same time, the public is more eager than ever to give the government a piece of its mind. You don't have to be a talk show junkie to spot this trend; just ask the White House operators, who on a busy day during the Reagan years might have fielded 5,000 calls but in 1993 are busy with 40,000 *a day*. Finally, factor in the most recent and significant development: the flourishing of technological tools that will allow anyone with a TV, a phone line, and a few minutes to spare to vote on any issue, any time.

This technology is expected to be on line by the time we elect our next president, and the

Research assistance for this article was provided by Nicholas Joseph and Ann O'Hanlon.

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public apparently has few reservations about using it. More than two thirds of all Americans favor national binding referenda on major issues, according to a 1993 survey by the Americans Talk Issues Foundation. Gallup surveys have put the figure at nearly 70 percent. All of which helps explain the rise of a populist like Perot, who can preach with complete credibility, as he did during the campaign, that "we can show everybody in Congress what the voters want, and we'll be programming [Congress]. That's the way it's supposed to be."

What Perot's getting at—and what most advocates of teledemocracy preach—is that empowering the people with a direct vote in policy-making is the surest cure for the two great plagues of our representative system: It is strangled by special interests, and it moves at a glacial pace. Teledemocrats figure that if only we turned the levers of power over to the people, well, we'd fix all that. For one, the people, by going over the heads of Congress, could quickly eliminate the tiresome, time-consuming political haggling and, say, decide to outlaw fat cat political contributions tonight at 10, and, if we felt so inclined, approve stricter gun laws tomorrow at noon. And at the same time, in a single stroke, we'd wipe out the clout of the nasty special interests. That's because the people cannot be bought, making all the lobbying by the monied interests as relevant as eight-track tapes. "It's the best way I know," says Mike McManus, organizer of USA Vote, a Maryland-based group attempting to organize national televotes, "to empower the people against the special interests."

Or is it? As we take our first timid steps towards Perot's push-button utopia, it's worth pausing to consider what we might forfeit in the process. Despite the rhetoric of populists like McManus, the evidence is that the closer we get to direct democracy, the more we *disempower* the common man, and at the same time enhance—or at the very least keep intact—the muscle of the monied interests. And while teledemocracy, no doubt, can short-circuit the haggling that throttles Congress and jump start our chronically gridlocked process, that much maligned horse trading may, in fact, be more valuable than any legislation it holds up.

So what will it be? No doubt, James Madison and bookish fellow Framers were bright guys, but they weren't seers: Let's face it, America's no longer a nation of yeomen. Perhaps technology has made their experiment in government obsolete. Perhaps it's time to deposit those interminable *Federalist Papers* in the recycling bin and move our system of government into this century. Should we, in short, stick with representarian Madison or turn to majoritarian Perot?

Mass appeals

That question has been developing steam longer than Con Edison. Back when Madison and company ruled America, the nation was governed by the elite, thanks to devices such as the election of senators by state legislatures and property qualifications for voting. Andrew Jackson gave the masses a louder voice a few decades later with universal white male suffrage. Gradually, political parties, replete with blustery conventions, opened the door a crack wider, and in 1968, the grassroots were further empowered through nominating primaries. By the eighties, TV had further eroded the filter between the governors and the governed, and, as the most recent election showed, even the Dan Rathers are being brushed aside. These days, if you're unsure whether to vote for a candidate, you can call him up on "Larry King" and interview him yourself.

In the meantime, while the U.S. has never held a national referendum, 26 states now permit citizens to put measures on the ballot for a

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public vote. And while initiatives have been possible in many states since the early 1900s, only in the last 20 years have they grown truly popular. From 1950-69, for example, only 19 state ballots were held in the entire nation. In 1988 alone, 50 were conducted. And if those referenda don't occur quite quickly enough for you, move to Colorado, where Gov. Roy Roemer has installed unofficial voting computers in shopping malls and public buildings to let citizens register how they'd like their tax dollars spent (more—or less—money for a. schools b. prisons c. voting kiosks, etc.).

Roemer, however, is no match for Referendum Ross. "We go to the people on television," Perot told the nation during the campaign, "and explain an issue in great detail, and say: 'Here are the alternatives that we face. As owners of the country, what do you feel is best for the country?' The American people react . . . and we know what the people want." Just to make sure we knew he wasn't bluffing, citizen Perot gave his televote a dry run not long after his 19 percent Election Day showing, holding a "national referendum" on 16 issues which, although statistically dubious, was a referendum nonetheless. If you're un-American enough to believe Perot's gone a bit far, you're decisively in the minority; while Clinton's favorability ratings have deflated since Election Day, recent polls show that if the election had been reheld in May, Perot and Clinton would have finished dead even.

While Perot is out in front on the referendum bandwagon, other high profile politicians such as Jack Kemp, Pat Buchanan, Richard Gephardt, and Phil Gramm have all supported the idea. And, in 1977, the last time the notion of a national referendum was raised in Congress, more than 50 Members supported the measure. (The bill would have permitted any initiative backed by 3 million signatures to be voted on by the public; if a majority of Americans approved, the initiative would have become law.)

Not to be left behind, the Clinton administration has hooked up a White House phone line to record public sentiment ("for the budget plan, touch one if you support the program"); holds conference calls run by the president to families around the nation; has signed on to a $5 billion plan to support the design of a fiber optics "data superhighway"; and has linked the White House to computer bulletin boards. It even plans to create BC-TV, the political equivalent of MTV, so that Americans craving a presidential fix can tune in to the Bill, Hillary, Al, and Tipper show 24 hours a day. And if you're not inclined to turn on BC-TV, the administration's got an answer for that, too: Clinton advisers Doug Ross and David Osborne are reportedly developing a communications strategy that would be based on sending—just after Clinton unveils any new initiative (through a public meeting, of course)—video and audio cassettes as well as quick response questionnaires to millions of Americans.

But with or without Clinton, or even Perot, most Americans will soon be hooked into our leadership through the already-under-construction data superhighway. In April, the nation's largest cable company, Tele-Communications, Inc., sharply accelerated the race to link the nation by unveiling a $2 billion plan to lay fiber optic cable throughout 400 communities by 1996. One hundred and fifty cities, the company said, will be on the interstate network by 1993. Tele-Communications is not alone; the more than 60 firms scrambling to get a toehold in the interactive market come straight from the Fortune 500: Intel, Time Warner, Microsoft, General Instruments, NBC.

The cyberprize they're chasing is the edge in the two-way fiber optic cable communications market, which will not only allow users, through their TV sets, to respond instantly to commercials, order food, conduct bank transactions, play along with live sporting events, pay bills, or guess the outcome of "Murder She Wrote" (for cheesy prizes), but vote—or at least instantaneously voice an opinion. So when, say, President Perot gives us his pie chart lecture on the Social Security crisis, and then asks us for some insta-policy, you need only pick up your book-sized interactive box and let your fingers do the voting.

That's no hype dream. In fact, such a system is already in place in several cities and has been used for just that purpose. Interactive Network in Mountainview, California, for example, which has linked more than 3,000 homes, held instant votes immediately after both Clinton's State of the Union address (four minutes after the speech was completed, 71 percent of the

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viewers punched in that they supported the Clinton plan), as well as Perot's most recent 30-minute infomercial. Perot was so enamored of the results that he contacted Interactive regarding a more formal link between the two organizations, Interactive officials said.

And while televoting is just one of several two-way TV applications companies are pursuing, more than a half dozen for- and not-for-profit organizations are aiming to put the new fiber optic technology to use for national on-line voting. USA Vote, for example, plans to launch an interactive TV show later this year that will feature 30 minutes of debate followed by an instant call-in vote on a major issue. Bruce Jaynes, president of Ohio-based Voter Systems Inc., who has spent eight years designing a system that will allow instant voting, is already attempting to negotiate a contract with a TV network to make his plan fly. And not-for-profits like the Markel Foundation and the Aspen Institute, as well as independent academics such as Amitai Etzioni and the University of Texas's James Fishkin, are examining ways to put the new technology to work. "The weird thing about all this," explains Gary Arlen, president of Arlen Communications Inc., a Bethesda research firm specializing in interactive media, "is that if you don't pay attention, you'll look up one day and it will all be here."

Greeced wheels

What's not weird, however, is the larger question that the push-button technology brings: whether to push. If, as teledemocrats claim, majoritarian government is the magic bullet that will at long last make our government the true servant of the common man, why not?

Several decades of experience in direct democracy at the state level—namely state initiatives and referenda—provide a clue. California in particular offers a useful model, where citizens have voted on more ballot initiatives—more than 200 since 1912—than anywhere in the nation. In fact, no society since ancient Greece has sustained such a long history of direct democracy. But not even Homer could mythologize the success of majoritarian government in California and other states, especially with regard to the clout of the monied interests. Of course, there have been some notable reforms passed directly by the people over the years, such as campaign finance reforms, bottle bills, tobacco tax hikes, and term limits for state legislators. Even so, even Hill and Knowlton couldn't put a happy face on the larger referendum picture:

● *More, not less, money is spent in direct democracy politics than in representative politics.*

In California, in both 1988 and 1990, more money (about $125 million each year) was spent—through ad campaigns, ballot signing drives, and get-out-the-vote efforts—to influence California voters on initiative measures than was spent by all special interests to lobby California legislators on all other legislation (more than 1,000 bills). Spending on single initiatives there and in other states can run as high as tens of millions of dollars. The alcohol industry, for example, spent $38 million defeating a proposed alcohol tax in 1990. The truly bad news, however, is not so much that the people eventually end up paying for these massive industry-run campaigns in higher prices, but that to battle the well-oiled industries, the goo-goos have to raise equally huge sums. Alcohol tax proponents in California, for example, wasted $1.3 million on their losing effort and environmentalists there squandered more than $1 million in 1990 on a campaign to save the trees. Not only is coming up with that kind of cash a task in itself, but it saps valuable time and resources from other areas of the cause, such as, say, funding anti-drunk driving campaigns.

● *Not only is more money spent, but direct democracy does not diminish—and can even enhance—the wealthy interests' ability to affect legislation.*

"Money is, all things being equal, the single most important factor determining direct legislation outcomes," concludes Colorado College political scientist Thomas Cronin, who authored perhaps the most comprehensive examination of direct democracy in the U.S. "Even proponents of direct democracy campaign reforms are pessimistic about solving the money problem." Study after study backs Cronin's claim: The Council on Economic Priorities found that in state initiatives the corporate-backed side almost

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always outspends its opponents, and wins about 80 percent of the time. And another recent examination that charted 72 ballot questions from 1976-82 similarly found that nearly 80 percent of the time the higher spending side won.

And who has the most money to spend? Certainly not tree huggers nor mothers against drunk driving. Businesses in California kicked in more than 80 percent of the money for the 18 highest-spending initiatives since 1956, while grassroots organizations were able to raise just 3 percent of all funds spent. It's not unusual for monied interests to outspend their opponents by factors of 20-to-1. In 1980, for example, Chevron, Shell, ARCO and Mobil and friends made a more than $5 million investment, outspending their opponents by 100-to-1, to ensure the failure of a proposed California oil surtax. Not even OPEC could buy this kind of clout: Five months prior to the vote, 66 percent of the people favored the tax, but after the industry bludgeoned the public with TV ads and other propaganda, only 44 percent of the voters stuck with the humbled reformers. In 1990, a Los Angeles initiative to ban the use of a highly toxic chemical at a Torrance, California, refinery lost, thanks to Mobil Oil's $750,000 effort—a campaign that cost the company $53 per vote, or nearly 12 times what the ballots' proponents could muster. A few of the measures that big money helped defeat in recent years included bills that would have raised the alcohol tax, required greater oil and gas conservation, brought tougher insurance regulation, created smoking regulations, required stricter handgun control, promoted forest conservation, placed a surtax on oil profits, and limited state salaries.

● *Voters are just as likely—and perhaps more likely—to be conned by special interests as representatives are to be bought by them.*

Look at it this way: If you are a salesman trying to sell a car to an 80-year-old woman, would you rather deal with her, or her representative—her son the lawyer? For the monied interests, that's a no-brainer. One clever technique concocted by industry groups is wait to see what do-gooder initiatives qualify for the ballot, and then quickly draft counter measures—measures which have no hope of passing a plebiscite, but are intended instead merely to confuse voters; the monied interests are well aware of studies showing that voters are easily confused by conflicting initiatives and as a result tend to simply vote "no" on both of them. A 1990 California environmental reform package, for example, known as "Big Green," was matched by two corporate-backed initiatives, one of which was billed as a "pesticide safety policy," funded by Atlantic Richfield ($950,000), Chevron ($800,000), Shell ($600,000), and Phillip Morris ($125,000), among others. All three were voted down. Also in 1990, part of the $38 million outlay by the alcohol industry to kill a proposed liquor tax was spent pushing two counter measures: a bill proposing the industry's own version of a liquor alcohol tax as well as an anti-tax measure.

If the special interests don't baffle you with their counter measures, they'll probably get you with their deceptive advertising. One recent study of 25 initiatives concluded that the most successful initiative opposition campaigns have won in large part based on airing confusing messages through paid advertising. In fact, dubious initiative ad campaigns are more likely to confuse voters than negative or false advertising in candidate campaigns simply because issue initiatives fail to provide voters with the traditional political cues, such as party affiliation, to help voters decide. And while representatives are not immune to lies and deception, it's a lot easier, not to mention cheaper, for an environmental advocate to counter a dubious claim if he's only got to convince a few congressmen—as opposed to a few million otherwise-distracted citizens—that Exxon's pulling a con.

Consider, for example, an ad run as part of a $6 million effort by Californians for Sensible Laws, an industry group led by beverage firms such as Budweiser, Coke, and Pepsi, opposing a 1982 container recycling initiative. The spot falsely claimed the bill would cripple the state's voluntary recycling program, making life especially tough for Boy and Girl Scouts: The ad featured a uniformed Boy Scout asking his father why "the grown-ups" were trying to close down "Mr. Erikson's recycling center and put us Scouts out of business?" Another beverage industry ad presented five Oregonians who claimed a similar law was unpopular in their state, even though polls showed Oregonians overwhelmingly favored the measure. It was revealed later that the "citizens" in the ad were four Oregon beer distributor employees and one supermarket employee. Sure enough, the spon-

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sors of the initiative could not afford a response, and although the bottle bill had 2-1 support in early polls, it failed by 44-56 percent.

What's also failed is direct democracy's ability to work in favor of racial and ethnic minorities. A few of the numerous examples where voters ganged up on those groups over the years include a 1964 California referendum in which citizens overturned by a 2-to-1 margin a law passed by the state legislature that prohibited racial discrimination by realtors. (In fact, of five referenda ever held in states to prohibit racial discrimination, not one has passed.) Last year, voters in Colorado passed an anti-gay measure voiding any existing gay rights laws in Denver, Aspen, and Boulder. And if you think majority tyranny is limited just to ethnics, racial groups, and gays, talk to the children of Kalkaska, Michigan, where citizens earlier this year voted to close down the school system three months early instead of paying an extra $200-$400 each in taxes.

Popular demands

Despite the evidence, let's assume the teledemocrats are *right*: Suppose that the people will take the time to be educated, and that the special interests will be persuaded or forced to refrain from false advertising and other deceptions. Suppose, in short, we *can* create a utopian system of majoritarian rule.

The good news for the Majoritarian Majority is that in some cases direct democracy will probably produce better results than representative government—say, in gun control laws. Which is precisely why the notion of push-button democracy plays so well in Perotville: It would be a wonderful world, indeed, if we could get the people together to vote on just those issues where we think the special interests are oppressing the rest of us.

But what about the rest of the issues, and especially those issues of belief, where fundamental rights come into play—issues such as the death penalty or gay rights. Do you want the majority deciding for you in those cases? One way to find out is by examining some examples of what the majority does believe. The majority of Americans would:

- sentence anyone who commits a murder to death
- send all occasional drug users to military style boot camps
- not allow any group to use a public building to hold a meeting denouncing the government
- ban movies with foul language or nudity
- ban from libraries books that preach the overthrow of the U.S. government
- make it illegal to publish materials the government classifies as secret
- outlaw the use of obscene gestures towards public officials
- favor the government keeping lists of people who partake in protest demonstrations
- keep in custody, when the nation is at war, people suspected of disloyalty
- require the reading of the Lord's Prayer in schools
- make homosexual relations between consenting adults illegal
- have rejected the Marshall Plan, and every year since 1950 voted to have spent less on foreign aid, and currently oppose aid to Russia

Of course, it is possible that the polls that produce such results were flawed; opinion can be distorted, after all, by the way questions are phrased. This is, in fact, the heart of the problem with majority rule through referendum. When the wording of an issue is frozen, and printed on the ballot, or even worse, flashed on the TV screen, there is no opportunity to do anything but take one side or the other—no chance, in other words, to see enough wisdom in the other person's arguments, or for him to see the point in yours, and for the wording to be amended accordingly.

In a representative government, legislators can, and do, deliberate and amend. These discussions can, of course, lead to imperfect compromise. But accommodation, however imperfect, may be essential to preserving the very fabric of democracy, especially when issues of morality and belief threaten to tear the nation apart. And the accommodation does not have to be imperfect. With deliberation, there is at least a chance that not only a better, but even the *right* law will result. Teledemocracy will deprive us of that chance. And, if you're not convinced, we can always vote on it. □

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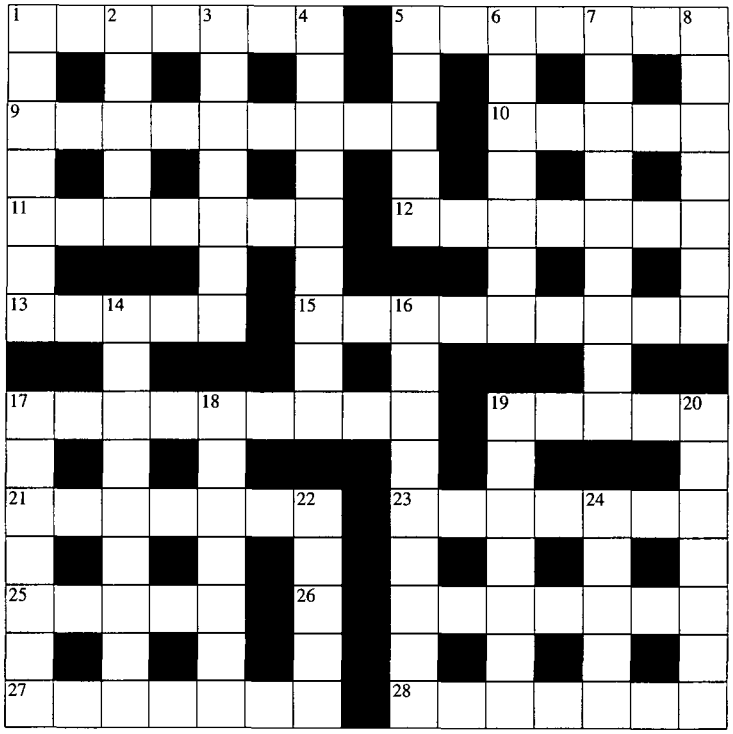
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



ACROSS

1 & 5. Presidential concern as if ring foe far apart. (7, 7)
9. Rude snide appearance is not welcome. (9)
10. Check back around start of campaign is more subtle. (5)
11. The drab new dimension. (7)
12. Practices unusual punt use. (5, 2)
13. Spinner in flight from San Pedro to Rochester. (5)
15. Resorted the folder a specific number of times. (9)
17. Picks up sad cradle to begin game. (4, 5)
19. Justice group to sit for picture around September 1. (5)
21. Let pips scatter to produce artistic effect. (7)
23. Take over something that is in broken lever. (7)
25. Force that could come into power? (5)
26. Reds' habit coming into play at infield spot. (5, 4)
27 & 28. Lou props up part of Presidential concern. (7, 7)

DOWN

1. Federal Reserve Board blue about incompetent. (7)
2. Ride around grand terrain feature. (5)
3. White House figure displays dire sin. (7)
4. Reliable guide somehow ran short with tea. (5, 4)
5. Special examination brought in to applaud its results. (5)
6. Inn and cafe managed together to get support. (7)
7. Result of slashing savagely is in coins. (9)
8. Injured Padres mad about beginning of curfew. (7)
14. Bad paid gun followed Teddy for improvement. (7, 2)
16. Holds back time-off showers? (9)
17. Utensil tossed to dumps. (4, 3)
18. Tail CPA around Washington, for example. (7)
19. Arranged duel in seed and accumulated. (5, 2)
20. Set veer specially for high point. (7)
22. Plant a tree for gourmand. (5)
24. Orate stylishly for love figure. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:

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Crock of Ages

Would the baby boomers please stop ranting about the twentysomethings?

by Michael Hirschorn

13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?
Neil Howe and Bill Strauss
Vintage Books, $10

"Imagine arriving at a beach at the end of a long summer of wild goings-on. The beach crowd is exhausted, the sand shopworn, hot, and full of debris—no place for walking barefoot. You step on a bottle and a cop yells at you for littering. The sun is directly overhead and leaves no patch of shade that hasn't already been taken. You feel the glare beating down on a barren landscape devoid of secrets or innocence. You look around at the disapproving faces and can't help but sense that, somehow, the entire universe is gearing up to punish you."

This image forms the thesis of Neil Howe and Bill Strauss's *13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail*, the latest effort to make hay out of the putative disenfranchisement of the generation of Americans born between 1961 and 1981. A book-long essay confected out of the vast wasteland of demographic studies, surveys, newspaper and magazine clippings, movies, music, advertising, and other ephemera, *13th Gen* purports to provide what marketers like to call a "psychographic" profile of the 80 million Americans born in that two-decade period. The thesis, more or less, is that this generation, of which I am a part, is a group of fully ironized, badly educated, dysfunctional underachievers who nonetheless have embraced the role of cleaning up the mess older generations have left behind.

The title of this book is an effort to fashion a buzzword out of the authors' calculation that this is the 13th generation in American history (they wrote a book last year called *Generations*, which casts the entire history of America in generational terms.) The neologism is an annoying contrivance. It clangs like a bungled ad line, and there's nothing we "13ers" hate more than bad marketing, you know. Reading this endless skein of cutesy, facile generalizations, I found myself repeatedly choking back the bile. I mean, who do these people think they are?

"Thirteeners are cursed with the lowest collective self-esteem of any youth generation in living memory," Howe and Strauss write with the kind of blasé self-confidence that characterizes this whole book. Elsewhere: "You just have to imagine"—do we really?—"a TV-glued 13er audience nodding in response to Jay Leno's line about why teenagers eat Doritos Tortilla Chips: 'Hey kids! We're not talkin' brain cells here. We're talkin' taste buds.'" Or, here, describing 13ers'—my—feelings about the workplace: "Like Michael J. Fox in *Back to the Future II*, most 13ers would be unfazed to learn that the boss who fires them 20 years from now will be a Japanese businessman wearing a thousand-dollar suit." We would? With the Japanese economy in the doldrums, this scenario seems less and less likely, but then again, what facts can compete with a Bob Zemeckis movie?

It's a classic error of pop sociology to invest the Capital-C Culture with the wisdom of the times. The only indisputable lesson Hollywood teaches us today is that pap and violence sell. It is another basic error to confuse a group of people with the media and merchandising others direct their way. If anything, this book comes at a time of profound disenchantment with conventional media of all stripes, and at a time when mainstream Hollywood, for one, seems unable (not to

Michael Hirschorn is articles editor of Esquire *magazine and writes a regular column called "Lost in the Funhouse."*

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mention uninterested) in contributing to some deeper understanding of its mostly youthful audience. This failure may explain the recent profusion of independent filmmaking, small presses, and self-published magazines, which have formed a kind of American samizdat in opposition to mainstream vanilla.

But *13th Gen* is blind to subtleties in the culture, so eager is it to use any type of social expression to prove its point. Howe and Strauss seem to feel that a contention is cinched if a movie, TV show, or advertisement exists that even superficially dovetails with their argument. After showing how 13ers have rejected the Boomer sixties esthetic, Howe and Strauss note that "like tie-dyed Marlena Baxter, making a living selling falafel to Grateful Deadheads, or like bell-bottomed Olivia D'Abo, cast as a hippieish girl in *The Wonder Years*, 13ers know how to present a Boomerish front when it works to their advantage." Here's how: "They just rent *Easy Rider* and *Hair* videos, and hey, no problem." Virtually any statement by a twentysomething seems sufficient to make a sweeping generalization: "Like the young *New Republic* editor Andrew Sullivan, [13ers] consider themselves 'post-ideological.'" We do?

There is nothing particularly new about older generations treating youth as some kind of outlying faunal manifestation (Howe and Strauss are, as they remind us throughout the book, Baby Boomers). *Details* magazine's David Keeps, with whom I chaired a recent panel devoted to marketing to twentysomethings, held up a sensationalist British paperback called *Generation X*, which devoted to the bizarre wants, needs, and habits of younger Brits—in 1962. Richard Hell and Voidoids wrote their anthem "Blank Generation" in the mid-seventies, with the nihilistic refrain, we "can take it or leave it each time." And, of course, there was Billy Idol, whose eighties band, Generation X, tried to articulate an anti-authoritarian punk gestalt for the suburban crowd.

The truth is that "generationality," if I, too, may coin a phrase, has never been a particularly useful way to explain America or Americans. When the appellation "Lost Generation" was applied to youth after World War I, it was a quasi-ironic commentary on the alienated posings of a small group of artistic elites. Generationality, as such, truly gained currency only when marketers, following on the heels of early rock 'n' rollers, realized they could exploit the anti-adult leanings of cash-rich post-World War II teenagers.

And of course, there are the ever tedious Baby Boomers. In transforming a brief period of self-serving social unrest in the sixties into a living monument to self-love, they obscure the fact that the sixties as it is conceived in the current popular imagination existed only for those lucky or rich enough to go to college.

For all the efforts of older writers/marketers to sell us kids on the idea of "Generation X," our generation really does not exist as such. What is interesting about people in their teens and twenties is what is interesting about America: our helter-skelter diversity and our consequently profound, even tragic, differences. Howe and Strauss pay requisite lip-service to the multicultural question. But they fail to realize that the proliferation of minority, sexual, class, race, and other particularist agendas has transformed us into a loose affiliation of generations, a kind of demographic Balkans. If anything, most young Americans I know tend to identify themselves as members of ethnic minorities of some sort, if that's what they are, or as scions of a fading WASP culture if they are not. Gays find themselves grappling with the political and social ramifications of their homosexuality. Blacks feel they must confront the issue of Afrocentrism. And many of my Jewish friends have chosen to yoke themselves to a long religious tradition precisely to anchor their wispy urbanity in more solid spiritual foundations.

The internal gaps between "13ers" are deep and not easily resolved by appealing to a common popular culture, which is itself becoming fractured. Increasingly, it seems, blacks and whites get their news from different sources, have different interests, watch different TV shows, and listen to different music. Fewer people listen to what older folks consider rock music than at any time in recent memory; they are turning to hip-hop, hardcore rap, hippy rap, house, techno, grunge, folk, country, heavy metal, death metal, funk, and even so-called neo-lounge music.

More substantively, the ongoing immigration boom makes mincemeat of the idea of American history as a self-contained march. The notion of a generation gap is meaningless when the parents of many Generation Xers spent their teen years in Guatemala, Poland, Thailand, or

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Iran, where the Baby Boom was not a significant cultural feature of the Pahlavi dynasty. Back at home, the gap between college-educated and non-college-educated Americans grows apace. And there is no intelligent way—though Howe and Strauss try their darndest—to tie together an abiding strain of Reaganism and an equally rigorous PC tendency.

To be fair to Howe and Strauss, there are broader points you can make about my generation. As the authors point out, our childhood and adolescence coincided with a striking rise in divorce. The divorce rate doubled between 1965 and 1975, and a child born in 1968 was three times as likely to suffer through a divorce than a child born in 1948. Exactly what effect this had is not clear, but it would not be excessive to suggest, as the authors do, that the partial breakdown of the family unit altered many of my co-generationalists' economic welfare, not to mention our experiences of childhood, and even our "self-esteem."

Likewise, it seems indisputable that my generation came into the job market at a singularly unpropitious time, with marginal job growth outside of what Douglas Coupland famously called the McJob sector. The decline of union power combined with the decrease of high-paying, blue-collar jobs has meant an almost crippling dearth of opportunity for those without specific job skills. The authors contend that as a result, 13ers no longer view their work lives as an opportunity to "find a higher calling," but rather as "a means of survival, as an opportunity to prosper, as something that doesn't mean anything but just has to get done if anybody's going to get paid." I can't prove them wrong on this point, but it seems reductionist, both in terms of our generation's cynicism and the older generation's supposed lack of concern for the bottom line. It is better, I think, to blame tough economic times for our generation's—indeed, most Americans'—hard-headedness than to suggest we have some kind of moral failing.

Trickier still is the authors' bald condemnation of American public schools. While it is incontestable that the school system bottomed out just as our generation was learning its Ps and Qs, it is not, as the authors claim, a simple question

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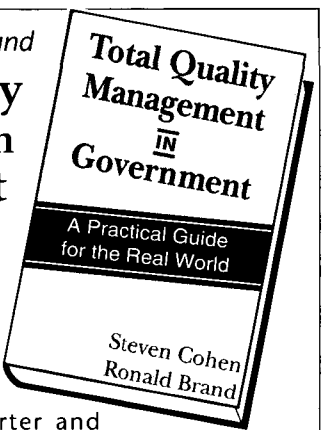

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of progressive ideology destroying traditional (i.e. good) pedagogy. In Howe and Strauss's account, "[Baby Boomer] students were expected to give 'right' answers and compete hard for grades and college admissions. Schools confidently performed their educational missions and were criticized only when they fell below prevailing standards of excellence. Social turmoil stayed outside the school house doors. With 13ers, that all changed." This is a rosy history, but it is hard to overlook the roiling issues of integration in the fifties and sixties, which politicized the public school and higher-education systems well before bilingual education came along. It is also difficult to ignore how the public education system was left to deal with issues of sex, drugs, diet, race, and class that the rest of society seemed uninterested in grappling with.

Luckily, Howe and Strauss allowed a younger writer, Ian Williams, to "crash" the book to offer a 13er perspective. The conceit is that the entire work was written on a bulletin-board service, and that Williams and his friends responded via modem to "2Boomers," as Howe and Strauss call themselves on-line. Williams has a hopeless task, but he is the best thing about this book; his remarks come out of specific experience rather than marketing surveys. He recounts a fourth grade class in which a classmate poured rubber cement on his model of the Acropolis and set it on fire. "So I hit him," Williams writes, "and then the principal came and put the fire out and took me to the guidance counselor. I told miss stern what he did, and she said that there were things about gary kline that I didn't know and that he was just expressing himself and that if we stop him from expressing himself then he'll only get worse."

Delightfully, Williams and his co-crashers become increasingly dismissive of "2boomers" as our fearless duo treads deeper into its grand theory. Someone named Cogan finally has enough. "If you guys are so concerned about being pigeonholed, why do you read this 2boomers stuff at all?" he writes. "[T]alk about being defined, man. I think this generation stuff is all bullshit. 7/8ths of this stuff has nothing to do with me. they ought to call it the 13th generalization. that's all I'm going to say." Fair point, but look who gets the royalties. □

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Squeeze Play

How Congress got baseball to cough up two more teams

by Matthew Cooper

Playing Hardball: The High-Stakes Battle for Baseball's New Franchises
David Whitford, *Doubleday, $22.50*

Even more than most genres, sports books tend to be pretty predictable fare. There are hagiographic accounts of teams which are written for the benefit of hometown fans and which usually contain a phrase like "The incredible story of. . ." in the subtitle. There are "as told to" biographies that are as fun as they are self-serving. A recent and welcome type of sports book works the crossroads of sport and commerce, or, more properly, sport *as* commerce. The goal of these books is not only to explain the culture of the clubhouse but also of the front office, to give color and shape to the guys in suits as well as the guys in uniform. *Barbarians at the Gate* meets *Ball Four.*

David Whitford's fun read falls into this last category. It's the account of the machinations that led to the creation of the Florida Marlins and the Colorado Rockies—both of which are now embarked on their first season. A Boston-based writer, Whitford parachuted into both Denver and Miami and kept a keen eye trained on the jockeying that marked both cities' efforts to acquire a franchise. What he's come up with is not only a solid sports book, but one with a public policy dimension that's worth wider consideration: the things cities do to revitalize themselves.

The Rockies and the Marlins are the first expansion teams in baseball since 1977, and, as fans know, that slow pace of expansion is no accident. (There were no new teams between 1902 and 1952.) The reluctance stems mainly from the wariness of owners to divvy up more of the pie, but also comes from a quite legitimate concern about the dilution of talent on the field. What got them to change in 1990, when they voted to allow two new teams into the National League, were two factors. First, their profits seemed safe. Baseball attendance had been soaring; television rights were up; the asking price for a new franchise had reached such a high level—almost $100 million to be shared among the incumbent owners—that the threat of a dip in profits seemed minimal compared to a few years earlier.

The second and more important spur to expansion was Congress' threat to lift baseball's exemption from antitrust laws—a status no other sport enjoys. The exemption dates to 1922 when Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes ruled that baseball was a game rather than a business and

Matthew Cooper, a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly, *covers the White House for* U.S. News & World Report.

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outside the purview of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Harry Blackmun, despite his reputation as a judicial activist, declined to overturn Holmes' opinion when he ruled on an important baseball case in 1972. In a majority opinion, he declared the exemption "illogical," but, citing precedent, he upheld it. In the manner of a Reagan-style constructionist, he ruled that the antitrust exemption is a matter "that is to be remedied by Congress and not this Court."

At times, Congress has toyed with the notion of removing baseball's antitrust safeguard. But for the most part, owners correctly dismissed the threat as halfhearted. Whitford tells the story of how that changed in the mid-eighties when a host of senators, eager to get a baseball team in their home states, threatened to lift baseball's exemption unless expansion was forthcoming. Al Gore (looking for a team for Nashville), Dan Quayle (Indianapolis), and especially Tim Wirth (Denver) joined the effort.

Wirth emerges in Whitford's account as a wily tactician, quick to understand the role Congress could play in making pro ball cough up more teams. He made it a point to attend the baseball owners' meeting just days after his election in 1986 to pitch Denver as a possible expansion city. He detailed a staffer to find out what Congress could do to put pressure on the big leagues; and it was Wirth who organized Gore, Quayle, and other expansion-hungry senators to come together for a press conference in early 1987 to threaten an end to the antitrust exemption.

If Wirth comes across as a savvy politician, then-baseball commissioner and oft-mentioned candidate-for-everything Peter Ueberroth emerges as anything but the suave wheeler-dealer you would expect. When Wirth's baseball task force held its first meeting, Ueberroth declined to meet with half a dozen U.S. senators. Instead, he sent his deputy commissioner who, in one of many very funny scenes in the book, Wirth derisively refers to as Ueberroth's "A.A.," Capitol Hill jargon for administrative assistant. When Ueberroth finally consented to meet with the senators, he was contemptuous, saying to them, according to a participant: "Do you want me to give you a line of crap? Or do you want the truth?" When Wirth dropped Ueberroth a note after the meeting, it took the baseball commissioner three weeks to respond.

Denver went full bore—even having the city's church bells ring "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" when major league officials came through town for their on-site inspection. Local politicians persuaded voters to support a cushy stadium deal, 70 percent of which would be financed by taxpayers. After the referendum passed, a memorandum was attached to the deal, and, incredibly, taxpayers wound up paying for everything.

Ueberroth thought that playing the role of tough guy would get Congress to back down. But it was his successor, Bart Giamatti, who charmed the senators. He argued that the removal of the antitrust clause would lead to havoc. (With owners free to move anywhere, he claimed, they would.) Eventually, in the wake of Giamatti's untimely death in the fall of 1989, baseball agreed to a limited expansion of two teams rather than the six the senators had tried to extract.

Whitford does a terrific job of explaining the hustling that the competing cities did to lure the big leagues to their home towns. Miami linked up with neighboring cities to sell itself as South Florida, gateway to Latin America's crazed baseball fans. Denver went full bore—even having the city's church bells ring "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" when major league officials came through town for their on-site inspection. In Denver, local politicians persuaded voters to support a cushy stadium deal, 70 percent of which would be financed by taxpayers. After the referendum passed, a memorandum was attached to the stadium deal, and, incredibly, tax-

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payers wound up paying for everything.

That does not augur well for Federico Pena, now Transportation Secretary and then Denver's mayor. Pena, eager to bring baseball to his city, emerges in Whitford's account as a can-do mayor who understands that baseball and other high-profile projects, like expanding the city's airport, could help the Mile High City rebound from the oil price collapse of the eighties. But Pena also emerges as too eager to please, a weak negotiator who gave Denver's baseball owners too much, including a two-year rent-free deal in which the city agreed to give the team 92 percent of its revenue from concessions. Is this the man who will reform government construction practices?

Ironically, as Whitford notes, baseball cared as much about the groups of millionaire owners bidding on a team as it did about their city. Thus, when the ownership group in St. Petersburg looked financially shaky, the city's dreams of a team were held hostage and finally died. (This episode offers one more reason why the *Monthly*'s longstanding suggestion that fans own their teams makes so much sense.) The local St. Petersburg government was largely powerless to do anything to avert the disaster. This was a particularly rough blow since the Gulf Coast city had banked heavily on baseball, building a $234 million domed stadium—on spec—in the hope of luring a team and shedding its image as "heaven's waitingroom," a town teeming with octogenarians and hemorraging business to nearby Tampa. The city's Suncoast Dome now hosts rock concerts and flea markets.

Obviously, when it comes to hustling business for a city, baseball is about as good an industry as a mayor can hope to get. As my *Washington Monthly* and *U.S. News* colleague Paul Glastris has noted, the only thing that's a more democratic experience than going to a ball game is standing in line at the department of motor vehicles. Beyond the fuzzy virtues of good feeling that's garnered from having a professional sports team, there is always the cash benefit, albeit a modest one. Yankee Stadium, for example, never "revitalized" the South Bronx as local politicians had promised when they sold taxpayers on a major

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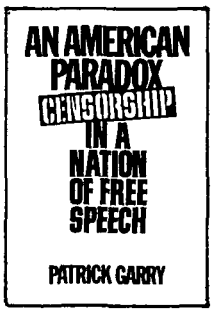

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government refurbishing to keep the Bombers in the Bronx in the seventies. But it's also clear that even the possible loss of the Yankees would have been bad for New York, not only mentally, but to a modest degree economically. The money was worth it.

The problem for urban taxpayers is that the bidding wars that go on for sports teams (or, similarly, for corporate headquarters or any number of other big-ticket projects) can lead to diminishing returns for everyone—especially when cities with declining tax bases wind up picking up the tab without the help of adjoining, wealthier suburbs. Cities wind up giving up too much in search of the magic bullet that's supposed to save their decrepit downtowns. For a while, the hot thing in urban development circles was convention centers. They had proven an enormous boon to cities like Atlanta and Las Vegas. But such depressed outposts as Gary, Indiana, lost millions in taxpayers' dollars trying to ride the wave. Aquariums are now all the rage. Chattanooga, Tennessee, recently helped private investors build a downtown aquarium to draw tourists. The facility is high-tech and terrific and may prove a lasting success. But a host of competing cities, including New Orleans and Baltimore, offer similar fare.

So called festival malls have been another sought-after panacea. In the wake of Boston's successful Faneuil Hall, other cities have tried to restore downtown historic sites by turning them into high-end specialty retail outlets. Some have fared well, but for every winner like Pike Place in Seattle there's a Water Street Pavillion in Flint, Michigan, that goes belly-up. But these are the risks of trying to help a city grow. In the end mayors wisely recognize what a lot of community activists don't: The public usually likes these big showy projects and won't forego them in order to sink more money into, say, wasteful school systems. And who can blame them? The Colorado Rockies are shattering attendance records. In just 17 games this year the team has drawn over a million fans—more than the expansion New York Mets did in their entire 1962 debut season. Mayors will—and should—keep searching for those dramatic purchases that enhance prestige and lift spirits. But is it too much to ask that they avoid the Pena Pitfall and cut the best deal possible? □

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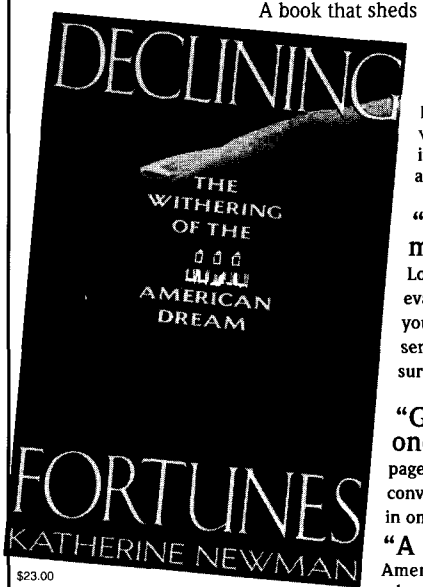

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Mark Pendergrast, *Scribner's Sons, $25*

"Southerners need carbonation," according to a character in one of Nancy Lemann's novels. Certainly the South's hot climate, its religious strictures on alcohol, and perhaps a regional tendency to hypochondria combined in the late nineteenth century to make it the principal font of the modern soft drink, and for whatever reason, Southerners still lead the nation in soda pop consumption. In one recent year, North Carolina's per capita consumption was 55.4 gallons—enough, I'm told, to leach the calcium from many Tar Heel bones and make stress fractures a minor public health problem.

Like Carolina's Pepsi and Texas' Dr Pepper, Georgia's Coca-Cola began as a patent medicine. John Pemberton, a Confederate veteran who had moved to Atlanta to seek his fortune, was one of many Southern pharmacists who saw the commercial opportunities offered by the newly popular soda fountain in a region characterized by widespread "neurasthenia" among Southern ladies (who were supposed to be high-strung) and depression, alcoholism, and drug addiction among Confederate veterans (Pemberton himself was a morphine addict). When Atlanta went dry in 1886, Pemberton was ready with a "temperance drink" he called Coca-Cola, after the coca leaf and the kola nut used in its production. Yes, despite what the guides at Coke's new Atlanta museum have been told to say and the company president's insistence in a 1959 statement that Coca-Cola was a "meaningless but fanciful and alliterative name," the real Classic Coke did contain cocaine.

By 1902, however, the dope had been removed because of pressure from clergy and public opinion alarmed by the spectre of Negro coke fiends. By then the marketing genius of Frank Robinson, a native of Maine and a Union army veteran, had transformed the product from a nostrum to a soft drink, and this Southern gift to civilization soon escaped its native habitat. Fifty years after its invention, Coca-Cola had become as much of a symbol of America as the Statue of Liberty, "a sublimated essence of all that America stands for," in the words of journalist William Allen White. By its centenary, Coke had transcended mere nationality, and its advertising was teaching the world to sing in over 135 countries and over 60 languages. Today, three-quarters of the company's profits come from overseas sales, and Iceland (of all places) leads the world in per capita consumption. In its first 50 years, the company sold nearly a billion gallons of syrup; in the next decade, the company sold a billion more. A $200 share of 1892 stock, with dividends reinvested, would be worth $500 million today.

John Shelton Reed is William Rand Kenan Jr. Professor of Sociology and director of the Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His latest book is "My Tears Spoiled My Aim" and Other Reflections on Southern Culture.

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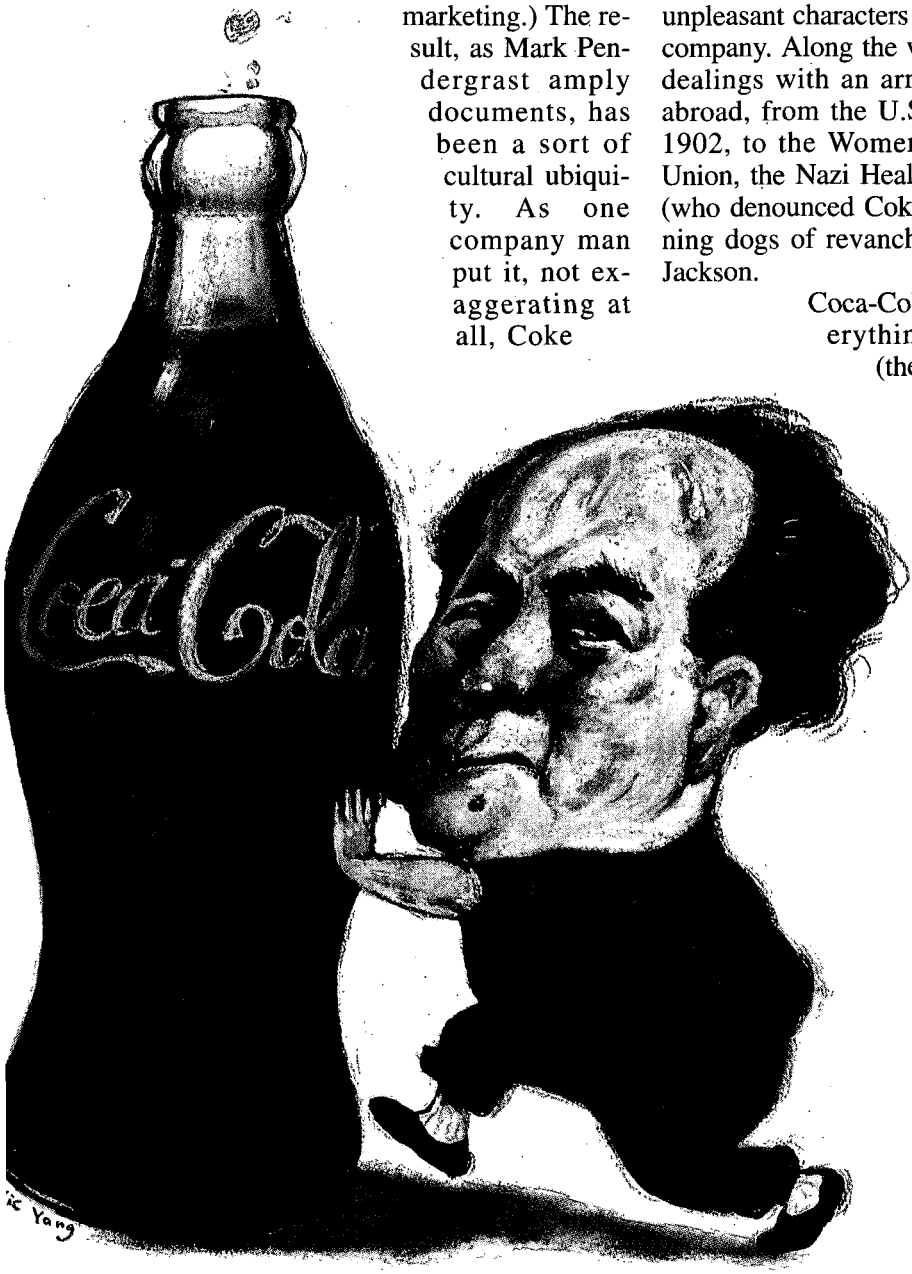
The key to the Coca-Cola story lies in the enormous profits to be made selling colored, flavored water. At the turn of the century, a $1 gallon of syrup yielded $6.40 at the fountain, enough for everyone involved to make money (often a great deal of it) while leaving enough to spend on marketing to guarantee that nobody could escape the product, its spokesmen, or its advertising. (The company now spends $4 billion annually on marketing.) The result, as Mark Pendergrast amply documents, has been a sort of cultural ubiquity. As one company man put it, not exaggerating at all, Coke has "entered the lives of more people . . . than any other product or ideology, including the Christian religion."

Pendergrast is an Atlantan on both sides of his family, and his interest in Coke is practically congenital. (Coke president Robert Woodruff proposed, unsuccessfully, to Pendergrast's grandmother.) He tells this commercial success story well, tracing the ins and outs of ownership and management struggles, examining the tensions between the company and its independent bottlers, and sketching profiles of the powerful and often unpleasant characters who built and managed the company. Along the way he looks at Coke's deft dealings with an array of critics at home and abroad, from the U.S. Bureau of Chemistry in 1902, to the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Nazi Health Ministry, Mao Tse Tung (who denounced Coke as the "opiate of the running dogs of revanchist capitalism"), and Jesse Jackson.

Coca-Cola has, after all, affected everything from urban mythology (the Coke and aspirin high) to Cold War mixology (the Cuba Libre). It has inspired country songs ("Coca-Cola Cowboy") and rock lyrics ("Coca-Cola Douche"). In movies, Coke containers have dropped from the Kalakari sky in *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, and tapped at an end-of-the-world radio key in *On the Beach*. In real life they've figured in allegations of sexual misbehavior against Fatty Arbuckle and Clarence Thomas. The beverage has longstanding ties to such American touchstones as McDonald's and Disneyland, and Coke ads have appropriated icons ranging from Uncle Sam to Santa Claus to Mickey Mouse.



Eric Yang

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In fact, nearly everyone this side of Mother Teresa seems to have had a Coke connection. Every American sport and entertainment hero except Elvis seems to have appeared in its commercials: Ty Cobb, Jesse Owens, Ozzie and Harriet, Eddie Fisher, Anita Bryant, Floyd Patterson, Ray Charles (who later defected to Pepsi), Neil Diamond, Bill Cosby, and scores of others. Hitler reportedly quaffed the drink while watching *Gone With the Wind* in his private theater. In post-war Germany, Marshal Zukhov couldn't be seen drinking imperialist brew, so General Mark Clark provided him with Coke specially made to be colorless. Desmond Tutu defused a protest over Coke's half-hearted South African disinvestment policy by appearing in a smiling picture with the company's president. Adolfo Calero was a Coca-Cola bottler until the Sandinistas grabbed his plant. Even the young Hillary Rodham makes an appearance in this book, denouncing Joseph Califano as a "sell out" and a "shit" for representing a Coca-Cola executive before a Senate subcommittee investigating conditions for migrant workers in the company's citrus groves.

It's all here: everything you ever wanted to know about Coca-Cola (including the secret formula) and probably much else besides. One chapter, for instance, examines how American fighting men in World War II completed the coalescence of Coke and country. Pendergrast offers a barrage of such interesting Coke facts as the price of a wartime black-market bottle (generally $5 to $40, but one brought $4,000 at an auction in Italy) and the battle password for crossing the Rhine (guess what). The author of *God Is My Co-Pilot* was not the only American who believed himself to be fighting for "America, Democracy, and Coca-Cola"; Pemberton quotes extensively from other GIs' letters home to prove the point. So important was Coke to the war effort ("the cause that refreshes," as one wag put it) that the company was exempted from sugar rationing, and German and Japanese POWs were assigned to work in its bottling plants.

Ironically, just as European intellectuals began to complain about the "coca-colonization"—meaning Americanization—of the post-war world, Coca-Cola began its transformation (as one executive put it) from "an American company with branches abroad [to] a multi-national business," overcoming such obstacles as the Arab boycott and the fact that the Chinese characters closest to the sound of Coca-Cola mean "bite the wax tadpole." The company's internationalization illustrates Jefferson's observation that the merchant has no country. It offers something to offend everyone, whether it be Coke's third-party supply arrangements with Communist China during the Cold War, lingering acquiescence in apartheid, or the replacement of Norman Rockwell by "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing."

Cola nuts

Pendergrast also examines Coke's changing responses to the Pepsi challenge. For decades Big Red could simply ignore its competitor. In a 1948 poll of veterans, two thirds identified Coke as their favorite soft drink; only 8 percent chose Pepsi. True, Pepsi offered more drink for the consumer's nickel, but it was widely viewed as "oversweet bellywash for kids and poor people," and, in the South, as a Negro drink. Coke's often radical marketing innovations have been coupled with extreme conservatism. The company's logo dates from 1887, its formula from the turn of the century, its six-ounce "Mae West" bottle from 1914. But during the fifties and sixties Pepsi slowly gained ground, and by the late seventies it actually surpassed Coke in supermarket sales and advertising dollars. The company's executives responded reluctantly: first, in 1955, with "King Size Coke"; then with competitive advertising, which implicitly recognized that Pepsi existed; finally, in 1985, with the sweeter, more Pepsi-like "New Coke."

My favorite of the many delightful stories in this book has to do with New Coke's reception. Despite its victories in "scientific" blind taste tests, the new product was rejected by American consumers as inferior in every way (even, according to a Harvard Medical School study, in its spermacidic properties). Interviewed at a supermarket, one elderly Atlanta lady said, "To use the vernacular of the teenagers, it sucks." The company received over 40,000 letters of protest and as many as 8,000 irate phone calls a day. "There are only two things in my life: God

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and Coca-Cola," one customer wrote. "Now you have taken one of these things away from me." Another complained, "I don't think I would be more upset if you were to burn the flag on our front yard."

During the furor, the company's president joked, "I'm sleeping like a baby. I wake up crying every hour." Although he continued to insist that the new formulation was superior, Coca-Cola (unlike, say, the Episcopal Church or the U.S. Government) knows how to cut its losses when it has a product nobody wants. When the restoration of "Classic Coke" was greeted with hosannas, ironically turning the greatest marketing blunder of all time into a commercial triumph, one executive said: "Some critics will say Coca-Cola made a marketing mistake. Some cynics will say we planned the whole thing. The truth is that we are not that dumb, and we are not that smart." (The company's president still doggedly drinks New Coke, now relabeled "Coke II." When it was renamed, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* readers suggested such slogans as "Coke II: The embarrassment continues," and "Coke II: It's not like we spilled it in Prince George Sound.")

The book is full of wonderful stories and tidbits like these. Pendergrast's asides on the world and national politics are often banal, and his efforts at anthropological analysis have an earnest, term-paper quality about them ("As a sacred symbol, Coca-Cola includes varying 'worshipful' moods, ranging from exaltation to pensive solitude, from near-orgasmic togetherness to playful games of chase."). But when he simply sticks to reporting the Cokelore he has gathered so assiduously, he is superb. □

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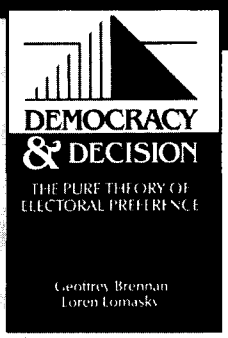

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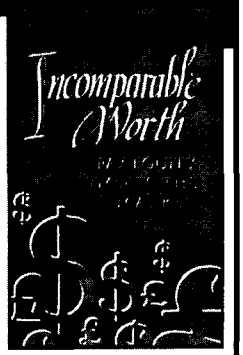

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

Queer in America
Michelangelo Signorile
Random House, $23

By Victor Zonana

I first encountered Michelangelo Signorile in June of 1988, when he was head of the media committee of ACT UP, and I was a reporter writing about AIDS for the *Los Angeles Times*. I watched in astonishment as this street-smart kid from Brooklyn and his ragtag army of hypsters worked the media like pros, offering up everything from theatrical demonstrations for the television cameras to tightly reasoned position papers for the more serious minded. As ACT UP's message about Reagan administration neglect and pharmaceutical industry greed seeped into the national consciousness, I made a mental note to keep track of this fellow.

I needn't have bothered. By June of 1989, Signorile had once again burst onto the scene, this time as a columnist for *Outweek*, the gay and lesbian news magazine of the ACT UP generation. For gay-identified men and women wearied by eight years of plague and centuries of homophobia—myself included—Signorile's diatribes were like weekly jolts of adrenaline. But he terrorized a small subset of gay people: public figures who remained locked in their closets.

"I realize you're oppressed, just like the rest of us (which is why you're hiding in the first place)," Signorile wrote in one of his more temperate moments. "But don't react to it by oppressing us. It's much easier for you to break the chain of homophobia than it is for me. You are in enormous positions of power. Use it. This is a crisis."

Malcolm Forbes, Barry Diller, David Geffen, Liz Smith, Pete Williams, Jodie Foster—none was spared Signorile's upper-case invective as he transformed himself into a one-man battering ram determined to smash down the anachronistic relic known as the closet. Thus was born the furor over "outing."

Now comes Signorile's *Queer in America*. Part memoir, part social history, Signorile's book is must-reading for members of the chattering classes who are struggling to come to grips with the gay and lesbian struggle for equality. As timely as today's headlines, *Queer in America* is a landmark book, ranking with such other gay masterpieces as Larry Kramer's *Reports from the Holocaust* and Paul Monette's National Book Award-winning *Becoming a Man*. For the first time, Signorile is able to circumvent the filter of the mainstream media and directly make his case for the abolition of the closet to a wider audience.

Well, almost directly. This book was subjected to the second-longest legal review in Random House history. The vetting resulted in the removal of a handful of names, and more importantly, poignant details in cases such as Merv Griffin's. While the lawyering undoubtedly weakened the book, it will lead to titillating parlor games inside the Beltway and in Hollywood as readers attempt to ascertain the identities of "The Legislator" and "The Mogul," closeted men who allegedly sexually harassed same-sex employees.

But *Queer in America* is more than a voyeur's delight. Signorile has produced nothing less than a deconstruction of the closet—an institution, he argues, that has outlived its usefulness. Subtlety and nuance are not his strong suits, but Signorile is right on target in his denunciation of the closet and the forces that keep it closed. "There exists in America what appears to be a brilliantly orchestrated, massive conspiracy to keep all homosexuals locked in the closet," he writes—and sympathetic straight people are some of the biggest enforcers. They do so by insisting on gay invisibility, a good example being the don't-ask, don't tell compromise being floated for gays in the military.

The media, the political system, and the entertainment industry make up what he calls "The Trinity of the Closet." In all three power structures, closeted gay men and lesbians serve as enforcers, and beneficiaries, of the closet.

But the world is changing, and for the better. The closeted sub-cabinet officials of the Reagan and Bush administrations are giving way to the openly gay and lesbian professionals in the Clinton administration. Even David Geffen—once denounced by Signorile as "the most horrifying kind of nightmare I've come to study in the grotesque mosaic of the media swirl" for producing an album by Guns N' Roses whose lyrics referred to "faggots" spreading a disease—has come out as a gay man and now devotes part of his fortune toward the struggle for gay rights.

The most moving part of the book concerns Signorile's own personal struggle to survive in a world that loathed his kind. "Brooklyn isn't the easiest place to grow up, especially if you're a homo," he writes wryly. Signorile attributes his survival skills to his working class father, who taught him to fight ethnic slurs like "wop" and "greaseball" with his fists. In a classic example of the pathology of the closet, Signorile himself would pummel kids who'd been labeled faggots by others. That way, he writes, "I could prove that I agreed they were freaks and distance myself from them. I became a queer basher to prove I wasn't a queer." Shades of Roy Cohn and J. Edgar Hoover.

The book concludes with what Signorile calls "A Queer Manifesto," queer, of course, being the word gay men and lesbians have appropriated from their oppressors in order to remove its sting. "Now is the time for all queers to come out and be counted," he declares. "Deep down," Signorile tells the closeted, "you know you have no 'right' to be where you are, that you were shoved in your closet a long time ago. Deep down, you know why you must come out and why it is wrong for you not to. It's better if you do it yourself. It's liberating and invigorating and empowering. And it's time."

Victor Zonana is a reporter for the Los Angeles Times *and a founder of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association.*

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Remembering Denny
Calvin Trillin
Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, $19

By James Fallows

Calvin Trillin's latest book has received the sort of consistently favorable press that often makes me suspect that log-rolling is underway in New York. After reading *Remembering Denny*, I'm convinced that the praise is genuine and well deserved. To my taste this is the best of Trillin's many books. It takes only two or three hours to read but raises questions worth mulling for a long time.

The one way in which the book fails is in giving a clear answer to the question with which it begins: Why, exactly, did the person Trillin had known in the fifties as a golden boy at Yale kill himself in 1991? Trillin had known this friend as "Denny" Hansen, a sunny-seeming, handsome varsity athlete and natural scholar who charmed everyone he met. Those who encountered the same man in Washington, in the decade before his death, knew him as Roger D. Hansen, a sour-seeming, run-of-the-mill figure at a think tank.

Trillin ends up confessing that he can't really explain how the first man turned into the second. Instead, he ticks off all the factors that might have played a part. Perhaps Hansen was at war with the realization that he was homosexual, which did not fit his own idea of fifties-style perfection. In middle age, Hansen suffered constant pain from back and shoulder injuries; perhaps this was just too depressing for someone who had starred on Yale's swim team. Hansen's family had a history of mental illness; perhaps, as another friend said at his funeral, he had been "depressed all of his life," even when seeming to be on top of the world. Perhaps it was simple bad luck and bad timing at several of his jobs. (For instance, he emerged as an academic specialist in "North-South" issues at just the time when Americans were getting bored with the Third World.) Perhaps there was no one decisive reason but just a number of things all gone wrong.

Trillin's inability to solve this mystery (as if anyone could) does not matter, because the book's payoff comes through the observations and portrayals along the way. Trillin has always seemed reluctant to draw big-picture conclusions in his writing, but his reporting is so careful and his descriptions so vivid and funny that the reader has plenty to work with when drawing conclusions of his own. In this book, the richest material concerns three main subjects.

One is the huge generational shift in perceptions of homosexuality. As an adult in New York, Trillin and his wife lived on one side of the generational divide, with plenty of openly gay friends. But as a child in Kansas City and as a student at Yale, Trillin had been on the other side of the divide, when "homosexuals" were exotic, theoretical creatures one did not encounter in daily life. Trillin had, of course, known Hansen from those days—from the era when a man who thought he was gay typically grew up "not simply hearing his closest friends tell faggot jokes but maybe even telling a few faggot jokes himself" for camouflage. Trillin's tone is heartfelt rather than wisecracking. In one of the book's sincerest moments, he regrets how much harm he—and everybody of the generation—did with casual "homo" jokes, before they knew how many of their friends might be hurt. "When we called somebody a fairy, the implication was not that he actually engaged in homosexual acts. We just wanted to say something mean."

A second endlessly rich subject is the connection between schooling and social mobility in America. Trillin presents his own position on the subject as being healthily uncomplicated. His own father, who grew up in a Russian-Jewish immigrant family, dreamed of modeling his son's life after Dink Stover at Yale. ("I have always assumed that he named me Calvin . . . because he believed, incorrectly, that it would be an appropriate name for someone at Yale.") Trillin therefore spares us the pussyfooting so familiar from people who say that

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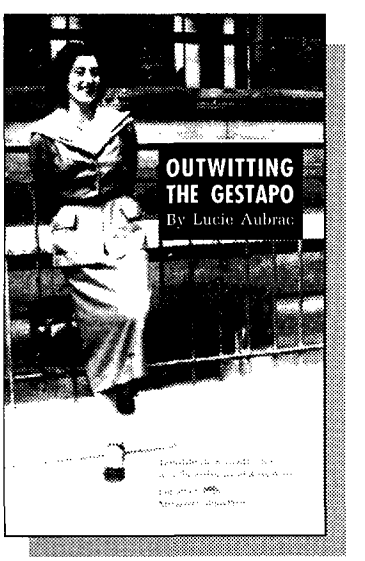

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they "went to college outside Boston," so as to make you drag out of them that they went to Harvard. Instead, Trillin sounds glad for the chance to have gone to Yale, glad to have been "tapped" for one of the secret societies, glad now to serve on the Yale governing board.

But he also has a lot to say about how Ivy League and prep-school snobbery has changed over the decades, and about the way early social snubs or victories shape people later in life. For example, like every public school boy from the hinterland, he was initially shocked by how many things preppies knew and he didn't. In a year or two, he and most other public school graduates found themselves doing better than most of the preppies and got the feeling that,

> a lot of the rich Eastern people were at Yale because of some entitlement of family or class or money and that we were there because, in ways that were perhaps not immediately apparent, we somehow deserved to be. . . Even now, nearly forty years later . . . if I meet someone who is easily identifiable as being from what was once called a St. Grottlesex background, my gut expectation—kicking in fast enough to override my beliefs about judging people as individuals, slipping in well below the level of rational thinking—is that he's probably a bit slow.

The idea of "deserving" to succeed brings us to Trillin's third main theme: what he considers the burden of "promise." When Denny Hansen left Yale, he might have seemed the complete fulfillment of what it meant to be "promising." He was off to Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship. *Life* magazine, back when it was the center of America's pop consciousness, chose him as the subject for a photo-essay on American college students. (The selection was partly happenstance, partly pure bigotry—the editors wanted to avoid a student who would seem "too Jewish"—but partly an indication of how completely Hansen seemed the all-American boy.) His friends thought anything was possible for him, which in practical terms meant that they joked about what cabinet jobs they'd have in the Hansen administration.

Trillin quotes a lot of Hansen's friends, especially Rhodes scholars, on how unfair and oppressive this "promise" can be. If you're capable of becoming president, they say, then to wind up anywhere else is somehow to have failed. "The way I see promise is that you have a knapsack, and all the time you're growing up they keep stuffing promise into the knapsack," a woman who knew Hansen in his later years told Trillin. "Pretty soon, it's just too heavy to carry. You have to unpack."

This is not completely convincing. For every "promising" person who is crippled, as Hansen seems to have been, by the idea that moderate success equals failure, there are probably ten people who draw essential confidence from early assurances that they have something special—and a hundred people who are held back by having been told that they had no promise at all. In this sense having "promise" is like having family money: it messes up some people, but on the whole is a plus.

James Fallows, a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly, *is the Washington editor of* The Atlantic.

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